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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

OLDER ADULT LEARNING ENVIRONMENT PREFERENCES

BY

KATHERINE W. R. DOWDING

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND

RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF EDUCATION

IN

ADULT AND HIGHER EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF ADULT, CAREER & TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL 1993

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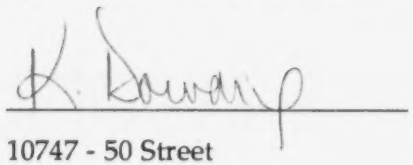

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OLDER ADULT LEARNING ENVIRONMENT PREFERENCES

SUBMITTED BY KATHERINE W.R. DOWDING IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION IN ADULT AND HIGHER EDUCATION.

Supervisor, Dr. Dave Collett

Dr. Paula Brook

Dr. Lili Liu

Dr. Wayne Lamble

Date: August 30/93

DEDICATION

To the "Wing Wednesday Women" (Karen, Carrie, Donna, Pauline and Maureen) for their support, encouragement, laughter and friendship which helped to make the journey meaningful and thoroughly enjoyable.

To some other special friends who believed in what I was doing, and who listened, encouraged and shared with me throughout the process.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to determine the learning environment preferences of older adults who had attended part-time, non-credit liberal arts courses offered by three educational providers in Edmonton, Alberta. These learning environment preferences included age-segregated and age-integrated courses, location, scheduling, instructor age, and instructional methods.

The study sample totaled 179 older adult learners. The sample was comprised of three groups, older adults who had attended the University of Alberta Spring Session for Seniors, older adults attending courses at Grant MacEwan Community College Senior Studies Institute, and older adults attending courses at the Edmonton Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired.

The results indicated that older adult preference for age-integrated or age-segregated classes was equally split between no preference for either and a preference for age-integrated classes. A large majority of participants preferred between 12 and 25 people in a class. Participants cited a preference to attend courses at community-based locations rather than courses at educational institutions locations. Among the factors to consider when choosing a course to attend, participants indicated that the ease of travelling to a course was the most important followed by the availability of parking, a location close to home, the cost of a course, and the course sponsor. Overall, the location of a course was considered very important to less than half of the participants. The scheduling preferences indicated a preference for courses during the week days with morning classes starting after 9:30 a.m. and afternoon classes finishing before 4:00

p.m.. Older adults preferred to attend courses once a week for a duration of four to six weeks. The fall was the preferred time of year to attend courses. The majority of the participants indicated that the age of the instructor did not matter. The most preferred instructional method was a lecture with some class discussion. Half of the participants indicated they would sometimes like to provide input into the instructional methods used in the classroom.

The findings of this study should be significant for program planners in community-based organizations and educational institutions who are presently providing programs for older adult learners, as well as those organizations and institutions that are planning to provide such programs. Recommendations are made for practice in the field of educational gerontology and for further research.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Education, almost universally provided to youth, has been extensively available to older adults only within the past thirty years (Peterson, 1983). The realization of the importance of lifelong learning has led to the development of educational programs for older adults. The emergence and rapid growth of this specialized age-related area in the adult education movement is known as educational gerontology. As a discipline, educational gerontology is still in its infancy. Unlike some professionals in the field of gerontology who focus on the declines that accompany the aging process, the educational gerontologist is in a unique position of providing a positive influence based on the belief that learning throughout the life span can improve the quality of one's life (Peterson, 1974).

The demand for educational programs for older adults is increasing and will continue to escalate according to social, economic and demographic trends which indicate that the older adult population is the fastest growing segment in North American society (Courtenay, 1990). As a result, there is an urgent need for programs designed to meet the needs and wants of older adults. It is recognized that older adult students will not accept the same methods, materials, and curricula that serve younger students (Peterson, 1983). Older adults are demanding substantial modification of admission procedures, content emphasis, evaluation processes, course scheduling, and instructional behaviors (Peterson, 1983).

To date, much of the educational gerontology research has been concerned with the reasons older adults participate in educational programs,

the ways in which they learn, and the benefits to be gained from learning (Lumsden, 1985). Another consideration which should be included with the variety of program needs and wants, and the modifications and approaches to these for older adult learners, is an understanding and knowledge of the learning environment preferences of older adults. It is important for the success of a program and satisfaction of older learners that program providers make a conscious effort to understand the diverse nature of the client group they are serving.

The development of educational gerontology has evolved through the changing beliefs about older adults. These changes are a result of a heightened social consciousness through an increasing older population, increasing knowledge of behavior, adjustment, health and growth in older adulthood, plus new research of older adult learning abilities (Peterson, 1974).

Statement of the Problem

Given that the older adult group is the fastest growing segment of the population (Dychtwald & Flower, 1989; Gutknecht, 1986), and there is an increasing market demand for educational programs for this group, what are the learning environment preferences of older adults, and how do these preferences vary with relevant learner characteristics?

Learning environment preferences were divided into five categories which formed the basis of the subproblems in this study.

1. Do older adults prefer age-integrated or age-segregated educational courses and how many participants do they prefer to have in such a class?

2. What are the course location preferences of older adults?

3. What are the course scheduling preferences of older adults?

4. Do older adults prefer older or younger instructors?

5. What instructional methods do older adults prefer, and would they like to have input into the instructional methods used in a course?

Assumption

This study was based on the following assumption.

1. It was assumed that older adults have some learning environment preferences and were able to indicate or describe these preferences.

Limitations

The following limitations were identified in this study.

1. This study was limited by the sample size and nature of the sample, i.e. the selection of participants in liberal arts courses.

2. This study was limited by the researcher's bias, knowledge, abilities and skills.

3. This study was limited by the nature and wording of the questions used to identify the learning environment preferences of older adults and other characteristics of older adults.

4. This study was limited by the different contacts with the participants, i.e., face-to-face contact with participants in a classroom to introduce the study versus mail letter contact.

Delimitations

The following delimitations in this study were identified.

1. This study included only the learning environment characteristics or preferences identified, recognizing the fact that there may be other characteristics or preferences that were not included.

2. This study included adults aged 55 years and older who attended part-time, non-credit liberal arts courses at the University of Alberta, Grant MacEwan Community College Senior Studies Institute, and the Edmonton Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired.

3. This study involved only those courses which offered face-to-face instruction versus independent study or distance education courses.

4. This study did not focus on course content, participant motivation, or course learning objectives which also impact program delivery.

Definition of Terms

The following are definitions of the terms utilized in this study:

Older adult: persons aged 55 years and older (Peterson, 1983).

Age-integrated: groups composed of a mixture of people under and over 55 years of age.

Age-segregated: groups composed of people of the same age group, i.e., over 55 years.

Younger instructor: an instructor under 55 years of age.

Older instructor: an instructor aged 55 years and older.

Educational institution location: courses offered by educational institutions as such as universities, community colleges and technical institutes, and non-profit independent educational institutions (adapted from Ventura's [1982] typology of educational program providers).

Community-based location: courses offered within community-based organizations, e.g., community or seniors' centers, area agencies that deal with aging, public libraries, churches, or museums (adapted from Ventura's [1982] typology of educational program providers).

Teacher-centered instruction: passive participation of learners, activities directed by teacher, e.g., lecture format.

Learner-centered instruction: active involvement of learners, e.g., discussions, group activities.

Teaching-learning process: the process involving instruction by a teacher/instructor and learning by the students.

Need for the Study

The demand for educational programs for older adults is increasing and will continue to escalate because the older adult population group is the fastest growing segment in North American society (Courtenay, 1990, Lumsden, 1985, Peterson, 1983). Older adults have a variety of problems or potential problems that stimulate a need for educational programs (Lumsden, 1985). As a result, there must be programs designed to meet the needs and wants of older adults. These needs and wants cover a range of areas from those dealing with content, methodology, and the learning environment. To date, there has been a lack of research on older adult education (Lumsden,

1985). To assist educational programmers and instructors in meeting the needs and wants of older adults it is essential to identify the learning environment preferences of older adults. Knowledge of these preferences may contribute to the effectiveness of educational programs and individual courses.

The following chapters of this study will examine the literature relevant to the identified learning environment preferences of older adults, describe the methodologies used in conducting this study, present the findings and interpretation of the data, discuss the study findings and their implications, and present recommendations for practice and further research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

"Educational gerontology is the study and practice of instructional endeavors for and about the aged and aging" (Peterson, 1980, p. 67). A major impetus behind the development of educational gerontology has been dramatic demographic changes. In Canada the older adult population has grown from 8% in 1976 to 11% in 1988. It is predicted that by the year 2000, 12% of the population will be over 65 years of age. Adults in this 65 and over group represent the fastest growing age group in Canada, which is increasing at twice the rate of the general population (Courtenay, 1989). Interestingly, within this group, those 85 years and over are the fastest growing age group. This group will represent an increase of 200% from 1960 to 2000 (Gutknecht, 1986). "However, the major impact of the aging society will not be felt until after the year 2010, when the baby boom of the 1950s and 1960s reaches retirement age" (Peterson, 1980, p. 3).

This "period of old age potentially encompasses a greater number of years than any other period of life" (Lumsden, 1985, p. 56-57), a potential span of 50 to 60 years, contrasted by 25 years in middle age, and 20 years in young adulthood (Lumsden, 1985). The consequence is that "a whole new period of life has been created, a time after the employment years but before debilitating health conditions require reductions in mobility, activity, and involvement" (Peterson, 1980, p. 3). The implications of these demographic changes and the expanded life stage in the lifespan for educational gerontology is that this growing segment of the population can continue to participate in their middle-aged activities, outside of the career, after retirement.

As a means to survive and adapt to the complexity of today's social changes, older adults require lifelong education to meet a variety of needs in their later years. These needs include coping skills, adjustment to changing roles, and fulfilling of personal desires. Education is an activity that can be pursued for the purpose of satisfying a variety of needs and interests. In this respect, the development of a philosophy and practice toward lifelong learning appears appropriate for the expanded life stage of older adults. However, the purpose of education for older adults extends beyond the provision of needs alone. Education must provide an outlet for self-expression, contribution to society, and appreciation of the meaning of life (National Advisory Council on Aging, 1990).

The term lifelong learning has been expressed in similar terms by various authors. For example, according to Cross (1981), "lifelong learning is not a privilege or right, it is simply a necessity for anyone, young or old, who must live with the escalating pace of change--in the family, on the job, in the community, and in the world-wide society" (p. IX). In the United Nations Economic Social and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) (1976) definition, the term lifelong learning "denotes an overall scheme aimed both at restructuring the existing educational system and at developing the entire educational potential outside the education system; in such a scheme men and women are the agents of their own education" (p. XI).

To date, much of the educational gerontology research activities have been concerned with the reasons why older adults participate in educational pursuits, the ways in which they learn; the benefits to be gained from learning (Lumsden, 1985); the capabilities of older learners (Davenport & Davenport, 1986; Bennett & Eklund, 1983; Wass & Olejnik, 1983); and the barriers

encountered (Gun & Parker, 1987; Kingston & Drotter, 1983; Kingston 1982). It is now recognized that older adult learners will not accept the same methods, materials, and curricula that serve younger students (Peterson, 1983). Older adults frequently demand substantial modification of admission procedures, content emphasis, evaluation processes, course scheduling, and instructional behaviors (Peterson, 1983). As a result, several issues of importance to the design and delivery of educational programs have been raised (Courtenay, 1989). Educational policies within institutions need to be revamped to consider the needs, styles and preferences of older adults (Dychtwald & Flower, 1989).

Some of the issues of importance that require attention and modification fall under the topic of this study--the identification of the learning environment preferences of older adults. The specific learning environment preferences included age-integrated or age-segregated courses and the preferred number of participants in a course, course location preferences, course scheduling preferences, age of instructor preference, and preferences for instructional methods. A review of the literature and a discussion of each of the preferred learning environment characteristics is presented.

Learner Demographics

The first section of the literature review includes a few demographic characteristics frequently reported in the literature. These include age, gender, level of education, income, and types of courses taken by older adults.

Age

Universally the older adult population continues to be defined chronologically. The U.S. Senate Committee on Aging has identified four groups: "the older population (age 55 plus), the elderly (age 65 plus), the aged (75 years plus) and the very old (85 plus)" (Courtenay, 1987, p. 6). However, with increasing frequency the literature is grouping older adults in two groups: the young old--those in their 60s and 70s who are healthy and independent, and the oldest old--those over 85 who require considerable care (Gutknecht, 1986). Neugarten and Neugarten (1987) support a similar age group distribution and advocate the distinction between the "young-old" between 55 and 75 who generally continue to be vigorous and healthy, and the "old-old" whose physical condition may become a serious problem. The young-old group refers more to the health and social characteristics rather than age. The increasing size of the young-old group represents a recent historical phenomenon which will continue to have significant impact in society as the baby boom generation is absorbed into it (Neugarten & Neugarten, 1987).

In Canada, 9.9% of adults aged 55-64 years participate in all forms of adult education, and among adults aged 65 years there is a 3.7% participation rate (Thornton, 1992). Studies of older adults attending open university courses have found that between two-thirds and four-fifths were in the 60-70 age-group, and there was a sharp decline in participation after the age of 70 (Kelly, 1989). A Canadian survey of 332 older adults participants in educational activities reported the average age to be 70 years (Clough, 1992).

Gender

In an extensive study of educational program offerings for older adults, Ventura and Worthy (1982) found that generally women who were 65-69 years composed the majority of older students, and that there was a sharp decline in participation by women who were older than 75 years of age. A study by Bynum, Cooper, and Acuff (1978) also reported significantly more participation by women than men. Similarly, in response to a survey of learning activities by older adults, Clough (1992) found that 73% of women versus 23% of men participated in education activities. Since women comprise two-thirds of the over 65 population, it is not surprising that many educational programs reflect such a gender split in attendance in educational programs (Courtenay, 1987; Kelly, 1989).

Level of Education

It is widely acknowledged in the literature that older adults participating in educational programs are likely to have higher-than-average levels of education (Glendenning, 1976; Lumsden, 1985; McClusky, 1972; Peterson, 1974). It is also well documented that age is inversely related to participation in continuing education and in general, the greater an individual's age, the less formal education (Glendenning, 1976; McClusky, 1972; Peterson, 1974). According to the U.S. Bureau of Census the "median number of years of school completed by persons over 65 in 1972 was 9.1 years. This means that nearly half of today's older population has had no high school education whatsoever" (Peterson, 1974, p. 45). This is in contrast to the average person under 55 years who has completed high school, although, within this group, age is not significantly related to the amount of schooling.

However, the middle population group, those aged 55 to 64 years, have more schooling than the older adult group, but less formal education than those under 55 years (Peterson, 1974).

A study by Barnes (1987) of college programs for older adults indicated that the participants were nearly equally distributed between college graduates and high school graduates. In similar studies by Covey (1981), Ventura and Worthy (1982), and Graney and Hays (1976), it was observed that there was a strong association between years of schooling completed and participation in educational programs. Statistics from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) data indicated that 30% (2,842,000) of older adults with a high school education were participants in adult education, but that participation declines noticeably for those with lower educational levels (Ventura & Worthy, 1982).

Since the amount of formal education is a significant predictor of participation in adult education programs, future generations of older persons, such as the baby boomers, will be more likely to engage in educational activities (Ventura & Worthy, 1982).

Level of Income

In a research study of older adults who participated in educational programs on college and university campuses (Barnes, 1987) 60% of the program respondents indicated that they were serving adults in the $5,000 - $10,000 income bracket, as well as those in the $10,000 - $20,000 income level and over. A Canadian survey of older adults participating in educational activities reported that the median income of these persons was $20,000 (Clough, 1992). "It is clear that some educational programming is drawing

lower income participants, but fewer people in the lowest income levels" (Barnes, p. 5). According to the American Association of Retired Persons (1987), older adults who have an annual income of $20,000 or greater are more likely to participate in educational programs.

Liberal Arts

In research studies of older adults enrolled in higher education classes Covey (1982) and Graney and Hays (1976) found that the liberal arts area was the primary topic of interest. A similar study which surveyed Elderhostel participants also found the liberal arts to be a very important consideration in choosing an educational program (Brady & Fowler, 1988). Courtenay's (1990) review of the types of courses older adults participate in supports the previous findings that although there are no particular subjects which attract older learners, participation studies claim that there has been a significant increase in liberal arts courses in colleges and universities.

Age-Integrated and Age-segregated Courses

Age-segregation in educational courses refers to the participation of a group of individuals approximately the same age, whereas age-integration refers to a mixture of young and old learners. One of the issues of education for older adults and one which requires answering according to Courtenay (1989), Marcus and Havighurst (1980), and Drotter (1981) is whether older adults learn better and are more satisfied in age-integrated versus age-segregated classrooms.

Education has traditionally been provided for youth with the intent to prepare them for life--primarily through career training. Throughout life most individuals have followed

> a path in which education [has been] synonymous with youth, work with adulthood, and retirement with old age. Such segmentation of life produces the problem of segregated generations, in which education occurs at schools that are 'youth ghettos', and the activity of the aged occurs increasingly in 'leisure communities' cut off from the rest of the world, both spiritually and physically (Marcus & Havighurst, 1980, p. 28).

The literature reflects some contradictory findings about age-integrated and age-segregated courses (Covey, 1981; Hooper & March, 1978; Peterson 1983). The school of thought favoring age-segregated classes utilizes adult development theories as a rationale. For example, Havighurst's developmental tasks for the three stages of adulthood are applied frequently. In his theory the learning tasks relevant for older adults are "adjusting to decreasing physical strength and health, adjusting to retirement and reduced income, adjusting to the death of a spouse, establishing an explicit affiliation with one's age group, adapting to new social roles, and establishing satisfactory physical living arrangements" (Peterson, 1983, p. 155). Using these tasks as a basis, age-segregated programs provide the opportunity to concentrate on the specific needs of older adults which then lead to the successful completion of the various developmental tasks.

According to Peterson (1983) and Marcus and Havighurst (1980) age-segregated instruction in programs for older adults is more common than

age-integrated instruction. Peterson states that although many "colleges and universities have attempted to recruit older persons into regular college courses either on a space-available basis or as regular students . . . this has typically been unsuccessful, since most older students prefer the more comfortable and supportive style of instruction that is offered to them in age-segregated courses." (p. 176). In support of this, Yeo (1982) stated that elders "resist the physical and mental competition with 'youngsters', and enjoy the common interests more likely to be found in age-homogeneous classes" (p. 6). Further support to this position was demonstrated by Fishtein and Feier (1982) in their study to uncover psychological barriers affecting participation. This study found that older adults had a fear of competition with younger students. Peterson (1983) contends that age-segregated courses are non-threatening and are more likely to create a supportive climate required for older learners.

Conversely, other studies have found that older adults prefer age-integrated classes (Clough, 1992; Covey, 1982; Hooper, 1981). Those studies supporting age-integrated classes advocate that there are benefits for both older and younger adult learners (Dellman-Jenkins, Fruit, & Lamber 1984; Firman, Gelford, & Ventura, 1983; Long, 1983). The rationale for this is that in age-integrated environments each generation learns more about each other and leaves the educational experience with positive attitudes about the other. Borthwick (1983) and Yeo (1982) suggest that older adults are excited by interacting with younger people in courses. Marcus and Havighurst (1980) suggest that the value structures of the young and old resemble each other in their attitudes more than either may resemble the generation between. Another advantage of age-integrated courses proposed is the potential benefit

of reducing the antagonism between the generations (Baum, Newman, & Shore 1982). In further support of age-integrated courses, research by Clough (1992) and Sprouse (1981) reported that age-integrated courses were likely to appeal to those who were younger, better educated, and more affluent, whereas adults with lower levels of education and income and were more attracted to age-segregated courses offered by community-based organizations.

In this debate of age-segregated versus age-integrated classes, a middle-ground position contends that "age exclusivity in adult education has value only for certain specific ends, such as remedial education, and probably will decline in proportion to the amount of education that eventually will be provided on a mixed-age basis" (Marcus & Havighurst, 1980, p. 45). The providers of education for older learners are divided in their opinion on whether courses should be age-integrated or segregated (Kabwasa 1988). Therefore, it is important that the learners be involved in program development and indicate what their preferences are and under what conditions. To do this it is necessary for educational programmers to examine each learning experience planned for older adults within the context of the purpose, content, and clientele (Courtenay, 1989).

Preferred Number of Participants

In addition to determining if older adults prefer age-integrated or age-segregated courses, it is useful to also consider the number of participants they prefer in a class. Based on research conducted by Daniel, Templin and Shearon (1977) it is recommended that the class size be limited to 28 students. Although a research study conducted at the University of Nebraska found that there was no significant effect of class size (Peterson, 1983), it is unclear if

adults' preferences for class size were considered in this finding. The overall limited research data on older adults' preference for class size emphasizes the need for further study in both age-integrated and age-segregated courses.

Location

The location of an educational program is of vital importance to older adults and is considered the major participation variable according to Courtenay (1987; 1990). The literature reviewed in relation to location was focused in three parts: preference for courses at educational institution locations or community-based locations, the importance of location, and the location factors to consider when choosing a course.

In the past decade there has been a phenomenal growth of campus-based educational programs for older adults in the U.S. including college tuition waiver courses, community-based programs, and educational organizations such as Elderhostel (Barnes, 1987). To understand the nature of the providers or locations, a framework of educational providers was developed by Ventura (1982). Three major categories of institutions who provide education for older adults were identified. The first category, educational institutions, includes colleges and universities, community and technical colleges, and nonprofit independent educational organizations, e.g., Elderhostel. The second category, community-based organizations, includes community or seniors' centers, local agencies that deal with aging, public libraries, churches, or museums. The third category of organizations is referred to as other sponsors, and includes national voluntary organizations, state departments of education and unions (Ventura, 1982).

Bass (1986) developed a similar typology of educational providers which differs from Ventura's (1982) in that educational institutions have been divided into regular programs which offer tuition waivier for older adults and non-credit continuing education programs designed for older adults. Bass' typology also included community-based organizations offering educational programs.

According to Ventura's (1982) analysis, community-based organizations are more frequently used by older adults than colleges and universities. "Community-based organizations have a long and distinguished record of providing educational opportunities for older adults" (Courtenay, 1990, p. 37). An extensive list of organizations providing education for older adults was reported by Donahue in 1956. These same community organizations are "among the most prominent locations for educational activities for the elderly today primarily because of their ability to respond in alternative ways to the diverse learning needs of older students" (Courtenay, 1990, p. 37).

Educational institutions, on the other hand, have given lip-service to the education of older adults, and have been "slow to adapt their offering to the needs of the older learner" (Canadian Association for Adult Education, 1982, p. 15). Community colleges have also been criticized for "falling short of enrolling a student body which is fully representative of the communities being served" (Borthwick, 1983, p. 18). However, McClusky (1974) defends the effort by community colleges and states that "there is evidence that [they] are beginning to take seriously their responsibility for providing educational services for older persons" (p. 9).

There are several reasons for the popularity of community-based organizations among older adults. These include location, schedule of programs, nature of programs offered, and format of these programs (Courtenay, 1990). The location of the community-based organization is viewed as being very important to older adults because it is often in the immediate community and close to home. This proximity contributes to a familiarization with and an awareness of the organization which therefore enhances participation (Fisher, 1986; Peterson, 1987). A study by Price and Lyon (1982) of the diversity of locations chosen by older adults suggested that they attended those organizations that were close and familiar. Peterson's (1981) findings support this conclusion, indicating that older adults prefer settings that are accessible and familiar.

Transportation has been identified as a major barrier to educational participation for many older adults (Drotter, 1981; Yeo, 1982). However, transportation difficulties are often minimized by the decentralized nature of community-based programs which are more accessible and convenient for the older adult population (Yeo, 1982). To ease the barrier to participation that transportation can impose, it is important that locations are easy to access via public transportation. In addition, for those with private transportation the provision of ample parking facilities is important. The proximity of educational opportunities has particular significance for older women. Since two-thirds of the older population are women and seven-tenths of them are widowed (Barnes, 1987), this often results in limited mobility for women, either because they cannot drive and/or because the partner they lost had always provided transportation.

Another important factor is awareness of the organization's location. A study by Fisher (1986) found that a high predictor of older adult participation in educational programs was awareness of the location. In this regard, many community-based organizations have an advantage over educational institutions due to proximity and exposure within the community (Courtenay, 1990).

In a survey conducted by Daniel et al. (1977) of older adults attending a community college, respondents were asked for reasons which influenced their selection of an institution, e.g., nearness to home, cost, program comprehensiveness, and open-door admissions policy. The results showed that the nature and content of the courses as well as the location of the courses were the most important factors. In another study conducted at the Andrus Gerontology Center of the University of Southern California, Peterson (1981) also reported that educational content was the most important factor in determining participation, followed closely by program sponsorship.

While the emphasis on content should be significant for all program sponsors, a study of community-based programs noted that seniors' centers often lacked an educational component in their programming and suggested that it could be strengthened by providing courses on personal development and problems with aging, as well as topics related to the home and family (Ralston, 1981).

In another study of older adults participating in educational programs on college and university campuses it was found that many older adults "do not participate because they are not comfortable on college campuses or are fearful of academic participation" (Barnes, 1987, p. 15). One reason for the fear

of educational institutions is that the majority of older adults grew up during and following the depression when many did not have the opportunity to attend such institutes of higher learning (Bass, 1986). This may result in some older adults feeling uncomfortable and out of place within such institutions.

A recent Canadian survey of older adult educational participation found that the most preferred location or sponsor was community centers (70%), followed by the media (62%), and self-directed study (46%). Educational institutions such as community colleges and universities were considerably less popular (28%) (Clough, 1992). These findings parallel those of DeCrow (1975), Heisel, Darkenwald, and Anderson (1981), and Ventura and Worthy (1982), and as noted by Clough, they indicated the importance of community sponsorship in programs for older adults.

The goal of community-based organizations to provide for all members of a community instills a "sense of ownership of places such as senior centers [resulting in the formation of natural links] between the community dwellers and the organization simply by virtue of the fact the program is perceived as existing for the community at large" (Courtenay, 1990, p. 39). Since community-based organizations must be responsive to the needs of the community, the scheduling of programs must be flexible and reflect the needs of older learners. Consequently, flexible scheduling is more easily accommodated by community organizations (Courtenay, 1990).

To reflect the diverse interests and needs of older adults, community-based organizations have the advantage of being able to offer a wide range of programs compared to the restrictions of many educational institutions (Courtenay, 1990). Community-based organizations also have the flexibility

to provide a variety of learning formats ranging from casual to formal which enhance the appeal to older adults (Courtenay, 1990).

Scheduling

The importance of providing flexible time scheduling of educational programs for older adults is addressed frequently in the literature (Courtenay, 1990; Daniel et al. 1977; Schuetz, 1981; Yeo, 1982). To be complete, course scheduling preferences should include time of the day, time of the week, time of the year, and duration of a course, however, the majority of research studies appear limited to gathering data on time of day prefcrences only.

"One of the most well-documented variables regarding participation of older students [in education programs] is the time of day for scheduling an educational opportunity. Almost without exception older adults prefer programs that are offered from late morning to mid-afternoon during the week" (Courtenay, 1990, p. 39; Yeo, 1982). This particular time schedule is important because it allows daylight travel time to and from the program, thereby reducing the fear of being out after dark, or driving at night. The research conducted by Daniel et al. (1977) supports the daytime scheduling of classes for older adults and further advocates that classes should commence after the morning rush hour and conclude before evening rush hour. In response to these scheduling preferences, community-based organizations are accommodating the older adult population (Courtenay, 1990).

The limited data in the literature suggests that older adults prefer to attend class once-a-week. Daniel et al. (1977) have suggested from their research that courses for older adults should be held once-a-week. This is sustained by Yeo (1982) who stated that older adults prefer classes with a

"once-a-week scheduling which minimizes transportation obstacles" (p. 6). This once-a-week preference is also supported by Sekiguchi (1984) who conducted a study of learning preferences of Japanese senior citizens.

Data on preference for attending courses on specific days of the week and at specific times of the year was unavailable in the literature.

Age of the Instructor

From the diverse range of educational program providers come instructors of all ages. According to Ventura's (1982) study of educational providers, numerous community-based programs reported using older adults as instructional staff, many of whom were retired professionals and volunteers from the community.

Peterson (1983) noted that a frequent assumption is that older adults prefer older instructors. Although both younger and older instructors are used in educational programs for older adults, there is a lack of data to indicate which type of instructor older adults prefer. However, a research study by Rindskopf and Charles (1974) in which younger and older students evaluated younger and older instructors, it was reported that there were no perceived differences in the effectiveness of younger or older instructors. Whether or not perceived effectiveness was related to preference was not addressed in that study.

McClusky (1974) suggests that a preference for a younger or older instructor may depend upon the nature of the subject. For example, topics relating to health concerns of older adults may be better appreciated if older instructors are involved. This, however, does not imply that younger

instructors cannot be effective, only that they may have to work harder to prove their ability and effectiveness to win the support and confidence of older students.

Another view is that the training of an instructor, and not his or her age, is more important (Marcus & Havighurst, 1980; Schuetz, 1981; Yeo, 1982). "It is desirable now and will become increasingly important in the future that the training of teachers of adults also include exposure to gerontology to assure greater sensitivity to the physical and social attributes of aging" (Marcus & Havighurst, 1980, p. 41), as well as to provide an understanding of the value of education for older persons. Such training will "assist instructors in program development, recruitment of learners, and the adoption of appropriate teaching methods and objectives" (Schuetz, 1981, p. 8).

Instructional Methods

The traditional youth-oriented approach of education makes it difficult for older adults to relate to the changes in educational delivery in many programs. This has often been sighted as one of the barriers to participation in education by older adults. "Removing [this] psychological barrier calls for emphasis on eliminating older persons' perception of education as they experienced it in their youth" (Borthwick, 1983, p. 17). Lumsden (1985) and Sekiguchi (1984) suggest that the older adult's attitude toward instructional methods may be influenced by the formal education previously received. The reason for this is that many older adults did not complete high school, and they remember education as "involving rote memorization, strict discipline, academic rigor, classical content, and limited relevance . . .

[furthermore, they do not expect education] to be pleasurable, stimulating, or useful" (Peterson, 1983, p. 148). Therefore, many adult learners expect and prefer formal, structured learning experiences based on the familiarity of prior education. However, it may also be possible for this factor to work in reverse, whereby older adults are more interested and able to contribute to student-centered instructional methods because of the numerous experiences they have gained throughout life.

There is a belief that the basic principles of teaching are similar for younger learners as they are for older learners. For example, both types of learners learn course content more easily if the subject matter is relevant, practical, organized, well presented, and summarized in a lucid manner. Andragogy, the term applied to the process of helping adults learn (Knowles, 1980) is equally applicable for older adults as for middle-age adults according to Peterson (1983) who stressed that it is neither practical nor necessary to develop separate instructional methods for older adults.

According to Courtenay (1987) one of the most significant questions to be addressed if improvements are to be made to education for older adults is what are the preferred and the most effective instructional methods for various groups of older adults? "While there is little research regarding the preferred teaching techniques for older students, the anecdotal literature indicates that a variety of instructional methods are effective with older learners--depending on the subject matter, the educational level, and the learning objectives" (Courtenay, 1990, p. 40). For example, many older adults prefer the use of informal group discussions led by an expert which "allows the older learner to participate not only as a receiver of information but also as a provider of information, sharing meaningful life experiences"

(Borthwick, 1983, p. 17). The use of discussion and experiential activities rather than lecture methods is strongly supported by the literature. On the other hand, there are older adults who prefer to take a more passive role in the classroom and are dependent upon the instructor to guide the learning experience (Courtenay, 1990).

A study of older adults attending credit courses and auditing courses at the University of Wisconsin found that half of the respondents preferred a seminar format because of the active involvement in the class (Hooper, 1981). Another study which identified course selection and motivational factors that influenced participation in Elderhostel and community-based educational programs for older adults found that about half of the older adults preferred a class format of lecture with group discussion, followed by a combination of lecture, discussion and hands-on experiences. The lecture method and experiential or hands-on learning were the least preferred instructional methods (Roberto & McGraw, 1990). Other research studies support older adults' primary preference for a combination of lecture and group discussion. Yeo (1982) advocates that regardless of the subject older adults should be allowed maximum participation. "The companionship to reduce isolation, the reinforcement of students' own worth, the peer learning and teaching process, all make discussion and informality highly preferable strategies to traditional lecturing" (p. 6).

One assumption about adult learners in andragogy is that adults come to the learning environment with a rich background of experience which can play an important role in the teaching-learning process (Knowles, 1980). Due to this experience, adults are more experienced-based in their learning style and, therefore, prefer instructional methods, such as group discussions,

which encourage active participation. Several studies indicated that older adults perceive their instructors to have the expertise and knowledge which they lack and, therefore, the lecture format encourages passive involvement rather than listening to classmates providing opinions on a topic (Paplia-Finlay, Dellman-Jenkins, & Herron, 1985).

Men and women may have different preferences for instructional methods. Davenport's (1986) study found that men preferred audio tapes, lectures, and extensive reading assignments more than women, and that women were more interested in group discussions when compared to men.

A position sustained by Courtenay (1989), Knowles (1980) and Peterson (1983) is that if the diversity among the older adult population is accepted, then the approach to program development and instruction must also reflect diversity, i.e., a variety of educational experiences and instructional methods should be planned. "Whether a group should be age segregated or age integrated and whether a class should use a lecture or case study format are questions that have to be addressed for each learning experience and in the context of purpose content, and clientele" (Courtenay, 1989, p. 531). This is supported by a principle of andragogy which emphasizes that the relationship between learner and instructor should encourage cooperative participation in the planning and the instructional process (Knowles, 1980). It is critical for the instructor to share responsibility for the teaching-learning process and to be conscious of the older learner's feelings about the instructional process and content (Bolton, 1976; Meyer, 1977).

Overall, the limited research on older adults' instructional preferences suggests that a teaching-learning format of discussion as it relates

to personal experiences would be most suitable. However, further research is needed to explore the instructional preferences of older adults (Davenport, 1986).

A factor related to preferred instructional methods has to do with an individual's learning or cognitive style. The question then becomes what are the appropriate instructional methods to use in the teaching-learning process according to the way individuals deal with information, and considering their past experience? (Peterson, 1983).

According to one typology of learners, there are two categories of learners--field-dependent and field-independent (Peterson, 1983). Those who are field-dependent are more attuned to the social environment and are conscious of interpersonal relationships, communication and interactions, whereas field-independent learners are more likely to be analytical in nature and ignore the social elements (Peterson, 1983). "Field-dependence/ independence is also associated with several demographic and developmental characteristics. Women are more likely to be field-dependent than men" (p. 172), and individuals with more formal education are more likely to be field-independent.

When learning styles are linked to instructional preferences those that are field-dependent prefer group discussion methods whereas field-independent learners tend to prefer either lecture or self-paced independent learning (Peterson, 1983). The instructional approach referred to as student-centered learning appeals to field-dependent older adult students who prefer informal settings, whereby interaction with the subject may be through discussion and practice, or other activities involving the learners as the

central focus (Knowles, 1980). Field-dependent learners who participate in a variety of activities learn more from such student-centered instructional methods. Therefore, it is possible to contend that if more is learned from this type of instructional method, there may be a preference for it as well.

In contrast to the student-centered instructional approach is the teacher-centered approach. This approach appeals to field-independent adults who prefer a more structured or formal environment in which the learner is passive and relies on the teacher who has primary responsibility for the learning experience. The traditional characteristic of this instructional method has been a teacher delivering a lecture (Lumsden, 1985). Just as in the case of older adults who have a field-dependent learning style suited to student-centered instruction, some field-independent older adult learners have a predisposition to a teacher-centered learning style. Although many adult educators and supporters of andragogical principles might consider the teacher-centered instructional approach to be inappropriate for adult learning, it must be acknowledged that some individuals have learning styles which lend themselves to this approach.

One of the premises of andragogy is that adult students should be permitted to take a more central and significant role in the learning process, that is, assume a responsibility for their own learning (Knowles, 1980). This can be accomplished by encouraging adults to be active in the selection of the instructional methods to be used, and in the selection of content. Research in this area supports the position that cooperation between teachers and students results in greater perceived relevance of learning and student commitment (Peterson, 1983). On this basis, an assumption could be made

that older adults would have a preference for learner-centered instructional methods.

In summary, the important point to be emphasized is not necessarily whether one instructional method is better than the another, but that an environment be created which fosters a cooperation between the teacher and adult learners in order to determine an approach that is agreeable to both.

Input into Instructional Methods

Although the literature does not specifically state if older adults prefer to have input into the instructional methods used, the andragogical approach advocates involvement of older adults in the planning and implementation of the instructional process (Peterson, 1983). Peterson stresses that although instructors may have greater content knowledge and expertise in methodology, the older learners must be given the opportunity to provide input and feedback on "their perceptions, reactions, and evaluations to modify the instructional process when it strays from their preferences. The educational design [should be] planned and monitored to keep the older learner in mind and to provide opportunities for dialogue and agreement on objectives, setting, content, and methods" (Peterson, p. 147).

In exploring curriculum models for older adult education Bramwell (1992) suggests that the Stenhouse model which focuses on input into the teaching-learning process would be more appropriate for older adults. This model contrasts the Tylerian model which is output focused, i.e., stating aims, setting objectives and transmitting information. A curriculum approach which may be more appropriate for older adults, as well as others, may involve the continuous "critical analysis of received assumptions, common-

sense knowledge, and conventional behaviors" (p. 445). In other words, older adults would share the responsibility with instructors by providing input into the teaching-learning process through critical analysis of the content and process.

Summary

A review of the literature demonstrates that some learning environment preferences have been researched with fairly conclusive and consensus-forming results, as in the case of preferences for the day-time scheduling of programs. Numerous studies have been conducted with respect to other preferences but with varying results, such as a preference for either age-segregated or age-integrated programs and a preference of program location. On the other hand, there has been limited research that addresses older adult learners' preferences with respect to the number of participants per class, day of the week, time of the year, duration of a course, and age of instructors.

The overall limited research and gaps in the literature regarding the learning environment preferences of older adults, indicates a need for further study in this area. The intent of this research study was to contribute to the body of knowledge about the learning preferences of older adults and to contribute to the development and growth of educational programs for older adults.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to identify the learning environment preferences of older adults who attended part-time, non-credit, liberal arts courses offered by the University of Alberta, Grant MacEwan Community College Senior Studies Institute, and the Edmonton Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired.

This study focused on specific characteristics or preferences in the learning environment which were reviewed in the previous chapter. These characteristics included age-segregated and age-integrated courses including the preferred number of participants per class, location, scheduling, age of instructor, and instructional methods. Within each of these characteristics there were variations or options of preferences outlined. Survey questions were designed to allow the respondents to select to varying degrees their preferred options associated with each learning environment characteristic or preference.

This chapter includes a description of the selection of participant programs, procedure for the selection of the study sample, instrument development, data collection procedures, data analysis, and summary.

Selection of Participant Programs

The three participant programs selected were the University of Alberta, Grant MacEwan Community College Senior Studies Institute, and the Edmonton Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired. These programs were selected for the following reasons: (a) they provided educational programs

and courses designed for older adults, (b) the courses were part-time, (c) the courses were non-credit, (d) the courses were in the liberal arts courses area, and (e) each study program represented one of the two primary categories of educational providers of older adult education as identified in the literature, i.e., educational institutions and community-based organizations (Ventura, 1982).

The University of Alberta's Faculty of Extension offers a range of leisure or recreation courses as well as part-time, non-credit liberal arts courses specifically designed for older adults. These courses are held once a year during a six week period following the regular academic year of September to April. The program is referred to as the Spring Session for Seniors and is open to adults age 55 years or older.

The Senior Studies Institute affiliated with Grant MacEwan Community College offers a range of courses, workshops and travel experiences for adults 55 years and older on a year-round basis. This program also includes non-credit, part-time liberal arts courses.

The Edmonton Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired is a community-based organization which offers a variety of leisure or recreation and liberal arts courses on a non-credit, part-time basis throughout the year. There is no minimum age for participation in the courses, however, the majority of adults are 55 years and older.

Procedure for Selection of Study Sample

In preparation for data collection, the researcher submitted a research proposal and the survey instrument to the Department of Adult, Career and

Technology Education for an ethics review. Once approved by the ethics review committee, the researcher sought permission from the University of Alberta, Grant MacEwan Community College Senior Studies Institute, and the Edmonton Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired to administer the questionnaire to their older adult learners. The first step in this process involved contacting by telephone the individual at each study program who had the authority or who was responsible for the older adult education program. For example, at the University of Alberta's Faculty of Extension, the coordinator of the Liberal Studies program was responsible for the Spring Session for Seniors. At Grant MacEwan Community College, the Manager of the Senior Studies Institute was contacted, and the program coordinator at the Edmonton Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired was contacted. At this initial step the researcher introduced herself, stated the purpose of the research study, the proposed method for administering the questionnaire, and requested permission to access older adult learners at the respective institution or organization. The researcher also indicated a willingness to share the results of the study with the institution or organization. It was also mentioned that a formal letter requesting permission to access the older adult learners would follow the telephone confirmation (see Appendix A).

Administration of the survey instrument was scheduled for September and October 1992. Because the study sample from the University of Alberta consisted of older adults who had participated in the 1992 Spring Session for Seniors courses, accessing that sample required contacting participants by using a mailing list. Permission from the University of Alberta's Spring Session coordinator was granted and a participant mailing list was sent to the researcher. A systematic selection of participant names was made, i.e., every

third name from the mailing list was selected for a total mailing of 75 potential participants.

The procedure for selecting the study sample from Grant MacEwan Community College Senior Studies Institute involved accessing older adults who were attending courses underway in September, October and November 1992. Although permission to administer the survey had been granted by the Senior Studies Institute manager, actual permission to meet with course participants was required by the individual course instructors. It was the researcher's responsibility to contact instructors and request permission to address their classes. The selection of classes to be accessed was made on the basis of instructors' permission and the availability of the researcher to meet with a class at a particular location, date and time. From the program schedule of courses offered, the researcher identified liberal arts courses, dates and times which would be appropriate and convenient to attend, and then proceeded to contact the corresponding instructors for permission. Upon contacting the instructors, the researcher explained that although the Senior Studies Institute had approved of the distribution of the questionnaire to it's adult learners, the instructor's permission was also requested. All the instructors contacted agreed to have the researcher meet with the class and a meeting time was arranged. The researcher visited five classes in order to obtain approximately 75 potential participants. The classes were held at various community locations throughout Edmonton, e.g., Strathcona Place Centre, Central Lions Recreation Centre, Woodcroft Branch Library, etc.

The procedure for selecting the study sample from the Edmonton Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired also required accessing older adults who were attending courses underway in September, October and November

1992. Individual instructor permission to access potential participants was also required. The researcher obtained a schedule of the course dates and times and met with each instructor prior to the class to request permission to address the class. The researcher visited six classes in order to obtain approximately 75 potential participants.

Instrument Development

Due to the selection of specific learning environment preferences in this study it was necessary for the researcher to design and develop a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 21 questions and was seven pages in length (see Appendix B). The first five questions and the last two questions addressed the demographics of the study sample. These included age of the respondent, gender, the location(s) of courses taken in the past year, the approximate number of hours spent attending one or more courses, the types of courses taken in the past year, the highest level of education completed, and the approximate gross income for 1991. These demographic factors were significant as they relate to the educational gerontology literature.

Questions 6 to 19 addressed each of the learning environment characteristics as identified in the literature review: age-segregated and age-integrated courses including the preferred number of participants per class, location, scheduling, age of instructor, and instructional methods. The questions asked respondents to indicate their preference for each learning environment characteristic using a Likert scale or by selecting the most preferred option from a list of options. Question 13 asked respondents to rank order their preference for time of year. Nine of the questions also included "other" or an open-ended response which followed the options

listed. This allowed respondents to specify their answer in the space provided. Question 17 consisted of eight open-ended statements regarding instructional methods and requested the respondents to complete each one. A space was provided at the end of the questionnaire for respondents to make any additional comments about learning environments.

The response variations or options available for each question concerning learning environment characteristics were as follows:

Question 6: Importance of location asked participants if a course location was not very important, somewhat important, or very important.

Question 7: Location preferences referred to the two primary categories of educational providers which offer educational courses for adults. The first of these categories was educational institutions such as universities, community colleges, technical institutes, and nonprofit independent educational organizations. The second category was community-based organizations including community or seniors' centers, area agencies that deal with aging, public libraries, churches, or museums. The locations listed were mutually exclusive. The questionnaire listed a number of locations representing these institutions or organizations and the respondents were asked to indicate their preference for each on a five-point Likert scale.

Question 8: Considerations when choosing a course asked participants to indicate on a three-point Likert scale the importance of specific factors that may affect their decision to attend a course.

Question 9: Age of participants was concerned with whether adult learners preferred age-integrated or age-segregated courses. Participants were asked

what age they preferred the other participants to be, i.e., older than you, about your age, mixed ages--younger and older, younger than you, doesn't matter, or depends on (open-ended option). Associated with age-integrated or age-segregated course preferences, question 15 asked participants how many people they prefer to have in a class. Options ranged from a class size of less than 12 participants to a class size of more than 40 participants.

Question 10: Age of the instructor was concerned with whether older adults had a preference for younger (under 55 years of age) or older instructors (over 55 years of age). The options ranged from younger than you to older than you, doesn't matter, or depends on (open-ended).

Questions 11-14: Course scheduling preferences dealt with (a) the time of day, (b) day(s) of the week, (c) time of year, and (d) duration of the course--the total length of time a course is in operation.

Question 16: Instructional methods dealt with older adult preferences for teacher-centered instruction, e.g., passive participation by learners and activities directed by teacher such as lectures versus learner-centered instruction, e.g., active involvement by learners through discussions, group activities. Five-point Likert scales were used to identify the preferences for four types of instructional methods, i.e., lecture, lecture and some class discussion, mostly class discussion, and a mixture of activities such as discussions, small group work, films, and field trips. Question 17 also pertained to instructional methods and used open-ended statements for respondents to indicate what they liked or did not like about the four types of instructional methods. Question 18 asked the participants if they would like to have input into the instructional methods used by the instructor. The

purpose in asking this final question was to determine the extent to which older adults preferred a learner-centered/directed environment or a teacher-centered/directed learning environment. Question 19 asked participants if they would like to have input into the content covered in a class. During the data analysis this question was omitted because it was considered to be related to subject content rather than a learning environment characteristic suitable for this study.

The questionnaire was piloted by 12 individuals, including master's students in the Adult and Higher Education program at the University of Alberta, two of the researcher's committee members, and older adults who were friends and/or neighbours of the researcher--some of whom had attended part-time, non-credit liberal arts courses. The older adults in the pilot study were considered comparable to the study's sample of older adults. The primary purpose of the pilot study was to obtain feedback regarding the clarification of wording or understanding of the questions. Some suggestions and comments made by the pilot group were incorporated into the final questionnaire.

Data Collection Procedures

The study sample from the University of Alberta was accessed through a mailing list of older adults who had participated in the 1992 Spring Session for Seniors. The second week in September 1992, the researcher sent a package containing a covering letter explaining the purpose of the study, a questionnaire, and a stamped return envelope to the researcher. A total of 75 packages were mailed to every third individual from the mailing list. The covering letter (see Appendix C) introduced the researcher as a master's

student in Adult and Higher Education at the University of Alberta who was conducting a study to determine the learning environment preferences of older adults. The letter requested the voluntary participation of the individual by completing the attached questionnaire and returning it to the researcher in the enclosed, stamped return envelope. The confidentiality of the study was stressed to the individuals. The researcher also offered to provide the results of the study for anyone interested. The opening statement on the questionnaire indicated that if an individual was not comfortable or did not wish to complete the questionnaire they were to place a check mark in the space available and return the questionnaire to the researcher. Those who completed the questionnaire were assumed to give consent to using their information in the study.

The study sample from the Senior Studies Institute was accessed through their fall courses which were underway at the time the survey was conducted. The researcher met with the selected classes for approximately 10 minutes over a three week period in September and October 1992. When meeting a class the researcher introduced herself, and briefly discussed the study and the questionnaire. It was explained that the purpose of the study was to determine the learning environment preferences of older adults involved in educational courses, i.e., was there a preference for age-segregated or age-integrated classes: what were their location preferences and scheduling preferences; did they have a preference for younger or older instructors; and what were their preferred instructional methods. The researcher stressed that participation in the study was voluntary, and that anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained, and that those who chose to complete a questionnaire would be considered having done so under informed consent.

The class was told that the questionnaire would take about ten minutes to complete. The surveys were then distributed by the researcher who indicated that anyone interested in participating could take one. It was also noted that there was a stamped return envelope with the researcher's name and address on it. The researcher then responded to any questions or comments from the class.

The study sample from the Edmonton Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired were also accessed through their fall courses which were underway at the time the survey was conducted. The researcher met with the selected classes for approximately ten minutes over a three week period in September and October 1992. The researcher utilized the identical procedures for selecting the study sample and for administering the survey questionnaire as was done for the Senior Studies Institute study sample.

Data Analysis

All of the questionnaires were returned to the researcher's home address by the third week in November. All open-ended responses were recorded on computer. Each questionnaire was then scanned by the researcher to ensure the circled responses were made in the correct space provided. For questions which requested only one response, and where the respondent circled more than one, the researcher used her discretion to choose what appeared to be the intended answer. For example, wherever possible, such decisions were based upon responses made to other similar or related questions. If the selection was unclear the item was discarded. The researcher also coded each question in the column provided, i.e., "for office use" to assist the key punch operator in entering the data. The questionnaires

were coded with an identification number prior to distributing to each sample group. For example, the Senior Studies Institute questionnaires were coded with an identification number in the 100 series, i.e., 100, 101, 102, etc., the University of Alberta questionnaires were coded with an identification number in the 200 series, i.e., 200, 201, 202, etc., and the Edmonton Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired questionnaires were coded with an identification number in the 300 series, i.e., 300, 301, 302, etc.

The next step in the data analysis was to have all the questionnaires entered into the computer in order to process the data using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSSx). While the data were inputted, the researcher prepared the code book of value labels and command values, and wrote the command/data file.

Once the data were entered, SPSSx was utilized to obtain descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages), and cross-tabulation analyses. Wherever possible, the data obtained from the various questions were collapsed prior to presentation. In general, each table presented was organized to show a rank order of frequency and percentage responses from highest to lowest. In the findings presented for each subproblem, not all responses add up to 100 due to missing values.

Data were presented by subproblem giving frequency first and then cross-tabulations as deemed appropriate and significant. A Chi-square value was deemed statistically significant at the $p<.05$ level. Data from cross-tabulations were compared or contrasted to frequency data where applicable.

Demographic data were organized in one table showing frequencies and presenting a participant profile. Participant ages were presented

according to three categories, i.e., 55 to 64 years, 65 to 74 years, and 75 years and older. The four types of courses possibly attended by the participants in the past year were not mutually exclusive, however, they were considered relevant to this study.

Data related to the subproblems were further analyzed using cross-tabulations according to the following respondent sub-categories:

Subproblem	Respondent Sub-categories
Age-segregated/integrated courses	age, gender, level of education, location preference, preferred instructional methods
Number of participants per class	preferred instructional methods
Location preferences	age, gender, level of education
Location factors	age, gender
Importance of location	gender
Time of day	age
Time of year	age
Instructional methods	age, gender, preferred number of participants per class

Questions regarding location preference, course duration, and instructional methods used a five-point Likert scale. However, during the data analysis these scales were collapsed to three-point scales for ease in reporting the results.

Responses from the open-ended question on instructional methods were analyzed by reviewing the responses and conducting a theme analysis. Inferences based on the data and the descriptive comments were incorporated into the findings.

The final step of the analysis involved relating the findings back to the literature review. Implications, recommendations, and conclusions were then developed and are reported in the final chapter.

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the methodologies applied in this study. It included a description of the selection of participant programs, procedure for the selection of the study sample, instrument development, data collection procedures, and data analysis.

The study sample was comprised of older adults who had attended or who were attending non-credit, part-time, liberal arts courses at the University of Alberta, Grant MacEwan Community College Senior Studies Institute, and the Edmonton Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired. A questionnaire was used to collect the data and the SPSSx computer package was used to analyze the data. Each of the subproblems were analyzed using frequency tables and cross-tabulations were selected where appropriate to examine variations and interrelationships between the variables.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results of the study. The demographic data are presented first, followed by an analysis of each subproblem including a brief summary of the findings. Frequencies and percentages are indicated, and where appropriate cross-tabulations are used to explain the relationship between and among variables. A summary of the total findings concludes the chapter.

There were a total of 244 questionnaires distributed to older adult learners from three sources: the University of Alberta, Grant MacEwan Community College Senior Studies Institute, and the Edmonton Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired. Over a three week period in the fall 1992, 184 questionnaires were returned by mail. Five respondents chose not to complete the questionnaire. The total number of usable questionnaires was 179, representing a response rate of 73%: 55 from the University of Alberta, 70 from Grant MacEwan Community College Senior Studies Institute, and 54 from the Edmonton Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired. The exceptionally high return rate is typical of studies which utilize the older adult population as a sample. The high response rate may also demonstrate a strong interest in this study.

Learner Demographics

The demographic questions in this study are reflective of the demographic characteristics of older adults frequently reported in the literature. They included age, gender, level of education, level of income,

types of courses taken, the number of hours spent taking courses, and the location of courses taken.

Age and Gender

The older adults who participated in this study ranged in age from 55 to 85 years. Due to the large age span of thirty years and the potential differences among them, the sample was divided into three groups--those 55 to 64 years, 65 to 74 years, and 75 to 85 years. As indicated in Table 1, the largest age grouping was 65 to 74 years of age (57%), followed by the 55 to 64 age group (26%), and those 75 to 85 years (18%). The gender split of the 179 participants was 147 females (82%) and 32 males (18%) (see Table 1).

Table 1

Learner Demographics

	n	%
Age (n=179)		
55 - 64	45	25
65 - 74	98	55
75 - 85	31	20
No response	5	-
Gender (n=179)		
Female	147	82
Male	32	18

(table continues)

	n	%
Level of Education (n=176)		
University	52	30
High school	42	24
Occupational training	35	20
College	25	14
Less than high school	20	11
Other	2	1
No response	3	-
Level of Income (n=161)		
Below $25,000	88	55
Above $25,000	73	45
No response	18	-
Types of Courses *		
General interest	155	90
Leisure/recreation	72	42
Career/professional	5	5
Pre-retirement	2	3
Number of Course Hours (n=176)		
30 to 60 hours	79	45
more than 60 hours	54	31
under 30 hours	43	24
Course Location *		
Community-based	139	80
Educational institution	90	52
No response	6	-

*multiple response

Level of Education

Participants were asked to indicate the highest level of education they had completed. As indicated in Table 1, over a quarter of the participants (30%) had completed university, followed by those who had completed high school (24%). Occupational training, primarily in the nursing field, rated as the third most frequently reported level of education (20%). Also, at the post secondary level of education were those participants who had completed college (14%). Those who had not completed high school represented the smallest portion of the sample (11%).

Level of Income

The questionnaire asked participants if their gross annual income for 1991 was above or below $25,000. Over half of the participants (55%) indicated they had an income level below $25,000, while 45% reported earnings above this (see Table 1).

Types of Courses

Participants were asked to indicate from four categories the types of courses they had taken in the past year, and multiple responses were reported. Table 1 indicates general interest courses were the most popular as indicated by 90% of the responses. Less than half (42%) of the responses related to leisure/recreation courses. The least attended courses were career or professional training (5%) and pre-retirement courses (3%).

Number of Course Hours

Participants were asked to indicate the approximate number of hours they spent attending one or more courses in the past year. The three selections listed were (a) under 30 hours a year, (b) 30 - 60 hours a year, and (c) more than 60 hours a year. Table 1 indicates that fewer than half of the participants (45%) had spent approximately 30 to 60 hours attending courses in the past year. Those attending more than 60 hours a year represented about a third (31%), while about a quarter of the participants (24%) had attended under 30 hours of courses in the past year.

Course Location

Participants were asked to recall the location of all the courses they had taken in the past year. There were two general categories: a list of educational institutions (i.e., university or community college), a list of community-based organizations (i.e., community center, seniors' center, seniors' organization, Edmonton Public Continuing Education, church, and YM/YWCA), and a third open-ended option for participants to specify any location. In the initial scan of the questionnaires, the researcher reviewed all open-ended responses to determine if the answers were appropriate for this selection or if any responses should be replaced with either the educational institution option or the community-based option. Most of the open-ended responses were coded in the community-based option.

As Table 1 shows, a large majority of the responses (80%) indicated course attendance primarily at community-based organizations/locations, while just over half of the responses (52%) reflected course attendance at educational institutions.

Age-Integrated and Age-Segregated Courses

The first subproblem identified in this study was to determine if older adults preferred age-integrated courses or age-segregated courses. This was accomplished by asking participants to indicate what age they preferred the other participants in a course to be, i.e., older, about the same age, mixed ages--younger and older, doesn't matter, and an open-ended option prefaced by "depends on".

As presented in Table 2, over a third of the participants (38%) indicated that it did not matter if the other participants were younger or older, while about a third of the participants (34%) indicated a preference for the other participants to be mixed ages--younger and older. Just over a quarter (27%) indicated a preference for the other participants to be the same age as themselves.

Table 2
Age-Integrated and Age-Segregated Courses (n=178)

Age	n	%
Doesn't matter	68	38
Mixed ages	60	34
Same ages	48	27
Depends on	2	1
Older	-	-
Younger	-	-
No response	1	-

Two responses were noted for the open-ended option. For example, "it depends on the course topic," and "the other participants should be able to understand and keep up--age is not important."

Cross-tabulations were examined between preference for age-integrated or age-segregated courses and variables such as age, gender, level of education, location preference, and preferred instructional methods and no significant relationships were found. Therefore, the data presented in Table 2 were not confounded by the above variables.

In summary of the preference for age-integrated or age-segregated courses, over a third of the participants indicated that it did not matter if the other participants were younger or older than themselves. In other words, it did not matter if they attended age-integrated or age-segregated courses. A third of the participants indicated a preference for age-integrated courses, while just over a quarter had a preference for age-segregated courses, i.e., other participants the same age as themselves.

Preferred Number of Participants per Class

Participants were asked how many people they preferred to have in a class. Table 3 shows that the majority of respondents (66%) cited a preference for classes with between 12 and 25 people. Following this response, there were no other strong preferences stated, in fact 22% indicated that it did not matter how many were in a class. However, some participants (8%) preferred to have less than 12 in a class, while an even smaller number (3%) preferred between 26 and 40 in a class. Only one individual indicated a preference for a class with more than 40 participants.

Table 3

Preferred Number of Participants per Class (n=179)

Class Size	n	%
12 - 25	118	66
Doesn't matter	40	22
< 12	14	8
26 - 40	6	3
> 40	1	.6

A cross-tabulation was carried out between the preference for the number of participants in the class and the preferred instructional methods. According to the Chi-squared test there was a significant relationship between the preferred number of participants in the class and the instructional method mostly discussion (Chi-square=15.81, df=8, $p<.04$). This indicated that the participants who preferred a class size of 12 to 25 people also preferred mostly discussion as an instructional method.

A summary of the preferred number of participants in a class indicated that the majority of older adults (66%) prefer a class of 12 to 25 people. The significant cross-tabulation result indicated a relationship between the preferred number of participants per class variable and instructional method mostly discussion variable.

Location Preferences

The subproblem dealing with older adults' preference of location focused on whether or not there was a preference for educational courses sponsored by educational institutions or community-based organizations. In

addition to the location preference, participants were also asked to indicate what other factors were important in deciding to attend a course, and how important course location was in their decision to attend a course.

To determine the location preferences, participants were asked to indicate if a course of interest to them was offered at the locations listed, would their preference for that location be never/rarely, sometimes, or fairly often/most often. The locations included the University of Alberta, community college, the Senior Studies Institute, local community center, local school, seniors' center, seniors' organization, and other--an open-ended option to be specified.

The results shown in Table 4 indicate that participants preferred to attend courses offered by community-based organizations rather than educational institutions. The most popular community-based organization location to attend a course was seniors' centers, which were indicated by over two-thirds of the responses (68%). Very few (7%) indicated they would never/rarely go to a seniors' center for a course.

Table 4

Location Preferences

Location	Preference (%) never/ rarely	sometimes	fairly often/ most often
Community-based Organizations			
Seniors' center (n=148)	7	24	68
Senior Studies Institute (n=134)	15	25	60
Local community center (n=129)	14	27	59
Seniors' organization (n=124)	19	25	57
Local school (n=123)	20	24	56
Educational Institutions			
University of Alberta (n=156)	21	28	52
Community college (n=116)	23	30	47

The locations ranked as the second most popular community-based organization location were shared equally between the Seniors Studies Institute (60%) and local community centers (59%). Approximately a quarter of the participants indicated they sometimes preferred both the Seniors Studies Institute (25%) and local community center locations (27%). A much smaller percentage (15%) reported they never/rarely preferred the Seniors Studies Institute and local community center locations.

The third ranked community-based organization preference was shared by seniors' organizations (57%) and local schools (56%). Preferences for sometimes attending these locations and never/rarely attending these locations were also very similar for seniors' organizations and local schools, i.e., a quarter and less than a quarter respectively.

Preferences for courses offered by educational institutions showed that half of the participants would often attend courses at the University of Alberta (52%), closely followed by those who would attend courses at a community-college (47%). Less than a third of the participants indicated they would sometimes attend courses offered by educational institutions, while about a fifth indicated they would never/rarely attend courses at these locations.

A cross-tabulation analysis between location preferences and age was statistically significant (Chi-square=10.90, df=4, $p<.02$). These results are presented in Table 5. Preference for courses located at seniors' organizations increased with age. Other cross-tabulations between location preferences and variables such as gender and level of education were not statistically significant.

Table 5

Cross-Tabulation: Age and Location Preference

Age	Location Preference - Seniors' Organization (%)		
	never	sometimes	always
55 - 64	25	30	44
65 - 74	18	27	54
75 +	7	-	93

A summary of location preferences indicated that almost two-thirds of the participants preferred to attend courses located at community-based organizations compared to about half who indicated a preference for courses located at educational institutions. The community-based location category showed three distinct preference groupings. The first group reflected a definite preference for courses located at seniors' centers, the second group preferred the Senior Studies Institute and local community center locations, and the third group preferred seniors' organizations and local schools. Within the educational institution category, participants showed a slight preference for courses at the University of Alberta over courses offered at a community college location.

Location Factors

The second question related to the location preference subproblem asked participants when they attended a course if certain factors were not important, somewhat important or very important. The factors to consider included the course being close to home, easy to travel to, availability of

parking, course sponsor, cost, and other--an open-ended answer to be specified (see Table 6).

Table 6

Location Factors

Factors	Importance (%) not	somewhat	very
Easy to travel to (n=169)	1	29	70
Parking available (n=147)	19	22	59
Close to home (n=149)	17	54	29
Cost (n=153)	11	61	28
Sponsor (n=142)	44	37	20

The most important location factor to the participants was the ease of travelling to a course. It was reported to be very important to the majority of the participants (70%), and only somewhat important to less than a third (29%).

The second most important location factor to the participants was the availability of parking. It was considered to be a very important factor by 59% of the participants. Those that indicated parking was somewhat important (22%) were almost equal to the number of those who did not consider it important (19%).

Participants considered a course location close to home less important as a location factor than the ease of travelling and availability of parking. A course which was close to home was somewhat important for over half of the participants (54%), while over a quarter of them (29%) considered it to be very

important, and 17% indicated it was not an important factor in deciding to attend a course.

The cost of a course was considered somewhat important by over half of the participants (61%), while over a quarter (28%) indicated cost was very important. Only 11% did not find the cost of a course was an important consideration in their decision to attend.

The sponsor of a course was not considered important to fewer than half of the participants (44%), while over a third (37%) said it was somewhat important. Less than a quarter (20%) of the participants considered the course sponsor to be very important when deciding to attend a course.

About 10 participants responded to the open-ended option. These participants also considered the subject material, quality of instructor, and someone to go to the course with. Other comments reinforced the factors already noted in the question selections.

Cross-tabulations were carried out between the location factors and age and gender. There was a significant relationship between gender and two location factors--parking (Chi-square=9.52, df=2, $p<.00$) and course cost (Chi-square=7.56, df=2, $p<.02$). Over half of the female participants (61%) indicated that parking was a more significant factor to consider than their male counterparts (52%). For a third (33%) of the female participants the cost of a course was very important compared to only 7% of the male participants. However, about three-quarters of the male participants (74%) indicated that course cost was somewhat important compared to 58% of females who found cost somewhat important. A cross-tabulation between age and location factors did not indicate a significant relationship.

A summary of location factors indicated that almost three-quarters of the participants found that the ease of travelling to a course was the most important factor to consider in choosing a course location to attend. The availability of parking was the second most important factor and a greater number of female participants found it to be more important than the male participants. A location close to home and the cost of a course were viewed equal in importance for less than a third of the participants. The cost of a course was a more important factor to consider for female participants than for male participants. Course sponsor was the least most important factor to consider in choosing a course location to attend.

Importance of Location

The third question related to the location preference subproblem asked participants to indicate the importance of a location in deciding to attend a course, i.e., not very important, somewhat important, and very important. Table 7 shows that almost half of the participants (48%) indicated location was somewhat important, while a slightly fewer number (44%) said location was very important. Only 9% of the participants reported that location was not important when deciding to attend a course.

Table 7

Importance of Location (n=174)

Importance	n	%
Somewhat important	82	47
Very important	77	44
not important	15	9

A cross-tabulation between the importance of location and gender indicated a significant difference between men and women (Chi-squared= 14.20, df=2, p<.00). Half of the female participants indicated location was very important compared to over half of the male participants who indicated location was only somewhat important.

A summary of the importance of location indicated that nearly half of the participants found that the location of a course was somewhat important, while a slightly fewer number found it to be very important. Less than a tenth of the participants stated that location was not important in deciding to attend a course. Female participants indicated that location was a more important consideration in choosing a course than the male participants.

Scheduling Preferences

The third subproblem in the study was to determine the course scheduling preferences of older adults. To accomplish this, four questions related to scheduling were included in the questionnaire. These questions related to preferences for (a) time of the day, (b) day of the week, (c) time of the year, and (d) duration--length of the course.

Time of day

The participants were asked to indicate their preference on a three-point Likert scale for six time choices: two morning start times (a) morning only--starting before 9:30 a.m., and (b) morning only--starting after 9:30 a.m.; two afternoon finish times (a) afternoon only--finishing before 4:00 p.m., and (b) afternoon only--finishing about 4:00 p.m.; all day--9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.; and evening (see Table 8).

Table 8

Time of Day

Time	Preference (%) never	sometimes	always
Morning only			
Start after 9:30 a.m. (n=144)	4	36	60
Start before 9:30 a.m. (n=126)	33	48	20
Afternoon only			
Finish before 4:00 p.m. (n=138)	4	45	51
Finish about 4:30 p.m. (n=116)	23	60	16
All day (n=127)	33	51	16
Evening (n=126)	48	49	2

The morning only--starting before 9:30 a.m.--was sometimes preferred by almost half of the participants (48%). About a third (33%) said they preferred not to start before 9:30 a.m., while even fewer (20%) indicated they always preferred morning courses, starting before 9:30 a.m.

The morning only--starting after 9:30 a.m.--was always preferred by a majority of participants (60%). Following this, 36% indicated they sometimes preferred courses in the morning only, starting after 9:30 a.m.

The afternoon only--finishing before 4:00 p.m.--was always preferred by half of the participants (51%). Less the half (45%) indicated that they sometimes preferred this time.

The afternoon only--finishing about 4:30 p.m.--was sometimes preferred by 60% of the participants. Almost a quarter (23%) indicated a

preference never to attend courses at this time. Those that always preferred this time represented a smaller number (16%).

Attending a course all day was the fifth time of day option. Half of the participants (51%) indicated they sometimes preferred this time, while a third (33%) never prefer it. An even few number (16%) indicated that they always preferred all day courses.

The preference to attend a course in the evening was almost equally split between those who never preferred this time (48%) and those who sometimes had a preference for this time (49%). A preference to always attend evening courses was selected by only 2% of the participants.

Cross-tabulations between time of day and age indicated a significant difference between the three age groups and preference for afternoon courses only--finishing about 4:30 p.m. (Chi-square=16.12, df=4, p<.00), and evening courses (Chi-square=9.69, df=4, p<.04). These results suggest that as age increased, the preference to never attend courses in the evenings also increased, i.e., 37% of those in the 55 to 64 age group, 50% of those in the 65 to 74 age group, and 75% of those in the 75 plus age group prefer never to attend evening classes.

Day of Week

The participants were asked to indicate the day of the week they preferred to attend a course by using a three-point Likert scale. There were three options for the preferred time of the week, week days--Monday to Friday, week end days--Saturday and/or Sunday, and doesn't matter. As illustrated in Table 9, a large majority of participants (88%) reported a

preference to attend a course during the week. Only a small number (12%) said it did not matter what day they attended. No one reported a preference to attend courses during the week end.

Table 9

Day of Week (n=177)

Day	n	%
Week day	155	87.6
Doesn't matter	22	12.4
Week-end	0	-

Time of Year

To determine the preferred time of the year to attend a course, the participants were asked to rank the four choices in order of preference, i.e., 1=first choice, 2=second choice, 3=third choice, and 4=fourth choice. The four choices were winter (December to March), spring (April to May), summer (June to August), and fall (September to November).

Table 10 indicates that half of the participants (51%) selected the fall as their first choice of the time of year to attend a course, and about a third (32%) indicated the fall would also be their second choice. Attending in the spring was selected by a third of the participants (34%) as their first choice. Less than a quarter (23%) selected winter as their first choice, although over a third (35%) indicated winter would be their second choice. Attending a course in the summer was unpopular with the majority of participants ranked it as their fourth choice (82%).

Table 10

Time of Year

	Rank %			
Time	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
Fall (n=166)	55	32	12	1
Spring (n=163)	34	22	43	2
Winter (n=157)	23	35	27	15
Summer (n=152)	3	6	10	82

A cross-tabulation was carried out between the variables time of the year and age. As age increased the preference for fall as the first choice decreased (Chi-square=15.21, df=6, $p<.01$). However, the fall was ranked second by the majority of the older age group.

Course Duration

The final question related to scheduling preferences asked the participants to indicate their preference for nine course duration options using a Likert scale. The course duration options included (a) one-day course, (b) once a week for 3 weeks or less, (c) once a week for about 4 - 6 weeks, (d) once a week for more than 6 weeks, (e) twice a week for 3 weeks or less, (f) twice a week for about 4 - 8 weeks, (g) five times a week for 1 week, (h) five times a week for 3 weeks, and (i) live-in course for 2 - 5 days. These results are presented in Table 11.

Table 11

Course Duration

Duration	Preference (%) never/ rarely	sometimes	fairly often/ most often
One-day course (n=145)	35	49	16
Once a week for 3 weeks or less (n=141)	38	38	25
Once a week for 4-6 weeks (n=143)	11	24	65
Once a week for > 6 weeks (n=153)	16	22	62
Twice a week for 3 weeks or less (n=138)	50	36	14
Twice a week for 4-8 weeks (n=140)	67	18	15
Five times a week for 1 week (n=135)	77	15	8
Five times a week for 3 weeks (n=126)	72	7	21
Live-in course for 2-5 days (n=144)	79	16	6

The duration of a course once a week for four to six weeks was preferred most often by two-thirds of the participants (65%). This was followed closely by a preference for a course once a week for more than six weeks (62%). Almost half of the participants (49%) indicated they would sometimes prefer to attend a one-day course. The most undesirable course duration option as indicated by 79% of participants was a live-in course for two to five days. Almost equally undesirable were courses that were held five times a week for one week (77%) and five times a week for three weeks (77%). Half of the participants (50%) indicated they preferred not to attend a course twice a week for three weeks or less, however, a third noted they would sometimes prefer to attend a course of this duration. An even greater

number (67%) indicated they preferred not to attend a course over a longer period of time, i.e., twice a week for four to eight weeks.

A summary of scheduling preferences indicate that the majority of participants had a preference for attending morning only courses which started after 9:30 a.m.. Afternoon only courses which finished before 4:00 p.m. were preferred by half of the participants. Courses offered all day were only preferred by 16% of participants. The evening proved to be the least popular time of day to attend courses. A cross-tabulation analysis indicated that as age increased so did the preference not to attend evening classes.

A large majority of participants indicated a preference for attending courses on a week day, i.e., Monday to Friday. For the remaining participants, it did not matter what day they attended.

To summarize the preferred time of year to attend a course, over half of the participants indicated fall as their first choice. Spring was the second most preferred time of year for a third of the participants. This was followed by only a fifth of the participants preferring winter as their first choice. Summer was a very unpopular time of year to attend a course.

A summary of course duration preferences indicated that over two-thirds of the participants indicated they preferred to attend a course once a week for four to six weeks while a slightly fewer number indicated they would also attend once a week for more than six weeks. Half of the participants indicated they would sometimes prefer to attend a one-day course. The least preferred course durations were live-in courses and courses requiring participants to attend five times a week, followed by attending a course twice a week.

Age of Instructor

The fourth subproblem was concerned with older adults' preference for younger or older instructors. This question asked participants to choose one of five options, i.e., instructors older than you, about the same age, younger than you, doesn't matter, and depends on--an open-ended option to be specified by participants. The large majority of participants (82%) reported that the age of the instructor did not matter. Participants' preference for instructors who were the same age as well as those who were younger were equally low in response (6%). No one reported a preference for instructors who were older than the participants (see Table 12).

Table 12

Age of Instructor (n=176)

Age	n	%
Doesn't matter	145	82
About same age	11	6
Younger than you	11	6
Depends on	9	5
Older than you	0	-

Nine open-ended responses were recorded for this question. The majority of the comments related to instructors in general and cited the instructors' ability, expertise, communication skills, and speaking ability as significant factors. For example, one respondent wrote, "qualification, experience and teaching expertise are more important than age." Another

respondent suggested that an instructor's age should depend on the type of course: "for recreation [courses] younger instructors are better."

A summary of instructor age preference indicated that the majority of participants reported that the age of an instructor did not matter. A very small and equal number stated a preference for instructors about the same age as themselves and instructors younger than themselves.

Instructional Methods

The final subproblem of this study addressed what instructional methods older adults preferred. This question used two separate formats. The first question listed four instructional methods and asked participants to indicate their preference for each on a Likert scale. The four instructional methods were (a) lecture by instructor, (b) lecture and some discussion, (c) mostly discussion with instructor and class, and (d) mixture of activities, such as discussion, small group work, films, field trips. The second question used an open-ended format and focused on the same four instructional methods. For each instructional method an open-ended statement was prefaced by "I like . . . " or "I don't like. . . ." For example, "I like a lecture by the instructor because . . . " or "I don't like a lecture by the instructor because . . . ." Participants were asked to respond to each statement.

Table 13 shows that a large majority of the participants (82%) stated that they always preferred lecture and discussion. Over half of the participants indicated always preferring a lecture by the instructor, while almost a third (31%) of the participants noted that they sometimes preferred a lecture. Preference for mostly discussion with the instructor and class was almost equally divided among never (30%), sometimes (35%), and always (36%). A

preference for a mixture of activities was almost identical in results to the preference for mostly discussion, i.e., never (29%), sometimes (33%), and always (37%).

Table 13

Instructional Methods

Instructional Methods	Preference (%) never/ rarely	sometimes	usually/ always
Lecture & discussion (n=168)	2	17	82
Lecture (n=150)	13	31	57
Mostly discussion (n=149)	30	35	36
Mixture of activities (n=151)	29	34	37

Cross-tabulations were conducted between instructional methods and the variables age, gender, and the preferred number of participants per class. A cross-tabulation between instructional methods and age did not prove any statistical significance. However, over half (53%) of the male participants indicated always having a preference for mostly discussion compared to less than a third (31%) of the female participants (Chi-square=8.21, df=2, $p<.01$). The male and female participants indicated almost equal preference for the lecture method and similar preference for the lecture and discussion method. The female participants were almost equally divided among never, sometimes, and always preferring mostly discussion with the instructor and the class.

A cross-tabulation analysis between instructional methods and the preferred number of participants per class was statistically significant. The majority of participants who preferred a class size of 12 to 25 people also preferred mostly discussion as an instructional method (Chi-square=15.81, df=8, $p<.04$).

The open-ended statements related to each of the four instructional methods were analyzed by reviewing all the responses and categorizing them into themes. Not all participants responded to each statement and in many cases there were multiple responses to the statements.

Lecture

The open-ended statement prefaced by "I like a lecture by the instructor because . . ." reflected three particular themes (see Table 14). The most dominant theme represented 47% of the responses and was related to the participants' view of the instructor. The comments made in relation to this theme were usually preceded with "if", indicating that participants liked a lecture if certain instructor-related conditions were present. For example, comments described instructors as the expert, authority, knowledgeable, and informative individuals who must be good, dynamic, competent, well focused and informed, and who possess a depth of knowledge and experience. Participants also said that instructors should bring new and modern ideas to the class, provide an inspiration to learn, and teach more than the students already know.

Table 14

I like a lecture because

Reasons	n *	% *
Instructor-related	62	47
Structure-related	31	24
Learning-related	28	21

*multiple responses

The second most noted theme indicated by almost a quarter of the responses (24%) was related to the structure of a lecture. The participants stated that they liked the structure of a lecture for the following reasons: organization of the subject, easier to follow, it is the most informative and productive method, the material is covered in the allotted time, it contains the pertinent facts, it is a concise method of learning, time is not wasted with irrelevant talk, it is the best way to get knowledge, and the lecture structure makes it easier to stick to the subject.

The third most noted reason for liking a lecture related to participants desire to learn (21%). Comments supporting this theme included: it opens up the way for questions and learning, it is a starting point for further study, it provides solid information, new perspectives, facts and figures, more topics are brought up, and it gives participants the most information.

The themes which evolved from the statement "I don't like a lecture by the instructor because . . ." resulted in two themes identical to those associated with reasons for liking a lecture, i.e., instructor-related and structure-related (see Table 15). Over half of the responses (51%) indicated

instructor-related reasons for not liking a lecture. For example, the responses expressed concern for instructors who were boring, opinionated, not willing to accept others' views, incompetent or not knowledgeable of the subject, and poor speakers.

Table 15

I don't like a lecture because

Reasons	n *	% *
Instructor-related	31	51
Structure-related	26	43
Fall asleep	5	8

*multiple responses

Structure-related comments represented 43% of the responses. Reasons cited for not liking a lecture included: it is less stimulating, no opportunity for feedback or clarification, it narrows the scope of material, only one point of view is provided, class participants may have views to contribute, concentration becomes a problem after an hour, and it is difficult to integrate information when only listening to a lecture. A small number of responses (8%) indicated they did not like a lecture by the instructor because they tended to fall asleep.

Lecture and Some Discussion

The statement prefaced by "I like a lecture and some discussion because . . ." revealed two predominant reasons for preferring this instructional method (see Table 16). The majority of the responses (68%)

were related to class participation. Some comment examples were: everyone is involved, a rapport with others is developed, class participation brings in reality, and there is more enjoyment with class participation. The second reason cited was related to learning from others (21%). The nature of these comments described the value of learning from others in the class, for example: other students' knowledge and experience revealed through discussion throws new light on the topics, everyone has had varied experiences and sharing is fun and informative, one learns from more than one person, helps to better understand the subject, broadens the course, adds to the learning, increases interest, and provides a total learning experience. A small number of responses (8%) said that a lecture and some discussion was more interesting. A small group of responses accounting for 5% noted they liked a lecture and some discussion for social reasons.

Table 16

I like a lecture and some discussion because

Reasons	n*	%*
Class participation	105	68
Learn from others	33	21
More interesting	12	8
Social	4	5

*multiple responses

The primary reason cited for not liking the lecture and some discussion instructional method related to student domination of discussion within the class (see Table 17). Over half of the responses indicated a frustration with other class participants who monopolized a discussion. A second reason for

disliking this instructional method was because the discussion goes off the topic (17%). A similar number of responses (15%) indicated this instructional method wasted time, i.e., it takes away from the lecture time and discussion takes too much time. The remaining responses (13%) described various reasons, including various personal reasons, for not liking a lecture and some discussion.

Table 17

I don't like a lecture and some discussion because

Reasons	n*	%*
Student domination	26	55
Off-topic	8	17
Wastes time	7	15
Other	6	13

*multiple responses

Mostly Discussion

The open-ended statement prefaced by "I like mostly discussion because . . ." revealed the same themes and similar response rates as did the statement about the lecture and discussion instructional method (see Table 18). Over half of the responses (53%) cited class participation as the primary reason for liking this method. The second reason was to learn from others (21%), followed closely by the third reason which stated this method was more interesting. A few responses (5%) indicated social reasons.

Table 18

I like mostly discussion because

Reasons	n*	%*
Class participation	39	53
Learn from others	15	21
More interesting	14	19
Social	4	5

*multiple responses

The responses indicated for not liking mostly discussion were again identical to those for not liking the lecture and some discussion instructional method (see Table 19). Student domination was the cited as the number one reason for disliking this method by over a third of the responses (38%). The second reason was related related to wasting time (28%), i.e., not having enough time for lecture. The third reason as noted by a quarter of the responses (25%) related to going off the topic.

Table 19

I don't like mostly discussion because

Reasons	n*	%*
Student domination	26	38
Wastes time	19	28
Off-topic	17	25
Other	6	9

*multiple responses

Mixture of Activities

The last open-ended question concerning instructional methods asked participants what they liked and did not like about a mixture of activities such as discussions, small group work, films, and field trips. Over half of the responses (52%) indicated they liked a mixture of activities because of the variety it provided (see Table 20). Comments described this variety as making the class more interesting, stimulating, and lively. Less than a quarter of the responses (20%) indicated there was more to learn through a mixture of activities. Additional reasons noted for liking a mixture of activities were class participation (12%), accommodation of different people's learning styles (5%), and appropriateness to use at certain times (4%).

Table 20

I like a mixture of activities because

Reasons	n*	%*
Variety	47	52
Learn more	18	20
Class participation	11	12
Other	6	7
Learning styles	5	5
Appropriate	4	4

*multiple responses

The reasons cited for not liking a mixture of activities as an instructional method varied considerably (see Table 21). The predominant reason indicated by a quarter of the responses (25%) was that a mixture of activities wasted time. The second reason was that this method was a poor

way to learn (14%). The third reasons which all tied at 11% were feeling there was a lack of instruction, a dislike for small group work, difficulty in concentrating on more than one thing at a time, and feeling that one's physical limitations impacted on a mixture of activities. A small number of responses felt that this method led to disorganization.

Table 21

I don't like a mixture of activities because

Reasons	n*	%*
Wastes time	7	25
Poor learning process	4	14
Lack of instruction	3	11
Dislike small group work	3	11
Difficult to concentrate	3	11
Physical limitations	3	11
Disorganized	2	7
Dislike field trips	1	4

*multiple responses

An overall summary of the preferred instructional methods indicated the large majority of the participants always prefer lecture and some class discussion. Over half of the participants always prefer lecture by the instructor, while almost a third noted they sometimes preferred a lecture. Preferences for mostly discussion and a mixture of activities reflected an equal distribution of interest. However, over half of the male participants indicated a preference for mostly discussion compared to only a third of the female participants.

Input into Instructional Methods

In relation to preferences for instructional methods, participants were asked if they would like to have input into the instructional methods used in the classroom. The questionnaire provided participants with five options to choose from, i.e., never, rarely, sometimes, most of the time, and all of the time. An open-ended option prefaced by depends on was also included for participants to specify.

The results illustrated in Table 22 show that over half of the participants (55%) would sometimes like to have input into the instructional methods used in the classroom. Slightly more than a quarter of participants (27%) responded that rarely would they want to have input. In response to the open-ended option, 5% indicated that providing input into the instructional methods used would depend primarily upon the course content and the instructor's knowledge.

Table 22

Input into Instructional Methods (n=169)

Input	n	%
Sometimes	93	55
Rarely	47	28
Never	11	7
Depends	9	5
Most of the time	7	4
All of the time	2	1

A summary of input into instructional methods indicated that over half of the participants would sometimes prefer to have input compared to

over a quarter who said that rarely would they want to provide input into the instructional methods used in the classroom.

Summary

The findings related to older adult learning environment preferences are as follows: Over a third of the participants indicated that they did not have a preference for age-integrated or age-segregated courses. The majority of the participants preferred a class size of 12 to 25 people. Participants indicated a slight preference for courses located within community-based organizations rather than educational institutions. The most important factors related to course location were the ease of travelling to a location and the availability of parking. The overall importance of a course location was considered somewhat important to nearly half of the participants, however, female participants indicated location was a more important consideration in choosing a course location compared to the male participants. The course scheduling preferences of the participants indicated a preference to attend: (a) courses Monday to Friday, (b) morning courses starting after 9:30 a.m. and afternoon courses finishing before 4:00 p.m., (c) courses during the fall, and (d) courses once a week for four to six weeks. The majority of participants indicated that the age of an instructor did not matter. The instructional method preferred by the majority of the participants was a lecture with some discussion. Half of the participants indicated that they would sometimes like to provide input into the instructional methods used in the classroom. These findings will form the basis for discussion in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to identify the learning environment preferences of older adults who attended part-time, non-credit, liberal arts courses offered by three different program providers in a large urban setting. An urban setting was selected because it provided educational institution and community-based sponsored programs for older adults. The learning environment preferences were comprised of five categories which formed the basis of the subproblems.

In addition to determining the learning environment preferences of older adults, the preferences were examined in relation to relevant characteristics. Each subproblem was analyzed with consideration to applicable demographic variables and cross-tabulated with other subproblem variables to determine if there were significant relationships. The variables used in the cross-tabulations included age, gender, level of education completed, course attendance at either community-based organizations or educational institutions, and preferred instructional methods.

The instrument used in this study was a survey questionnaire which was seven pages in length and consisted of 21 questions. It was administered to older adult learners from the University of Alberta Spring Session for Seniors, Grant MacEwan Community College Senior Studies Institute, and the Edmonton Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired. Seventy-five questionnaires for the University of Alberta sample group were mailed to those who attended courses in the spring of 1992. The other sample groups, Grant MacEwan Community College Senior Studies Institute and the

Edmonton Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired were attending courses in the fall of 1992 at the time the researcher was conducting the study. As a result, the researcher was able to meet with a number of classes to personally administered the questionnaire. Volunteers returned their questionnaire by mail to the researcher. A total of 244 questionnaires was distributed and 179 usable questionnaires were returned for a high response rate 73%.

The researcher recorded the qualitative data from the questionnaires as they were received and a theme analysis was conducted. The quantitative data from the questionnaires were then coded and processed to produce descriptive results. Cross-tabulations and chi-square tests on selected variables were conducted.

Learner Demographics

Age

The majority of older adults in this study were between the ages of 55 and 74 years of age. According to Kelly's (1989) study of older adults attending open university courses, the majority of participants were in the 60 to 70 age group, while the number participants over the age of 70 dropped considerably. This is comparable to the findings of this study in which 54% of the participants were in the 65 to 74 year age group compared to only 20% in the 75 to 85 year age group.

Gender

The ratio of female participants to male participants in this study was about four to one. This predominantly female participation rate is consistent

with the findings in the literature which report significantly more women than men participate in educational programs (Clough, 1992; Courtenay, 1987; Kelly, 1989; Peterson, 1981). It should be considered that women may not necessarily be more interested in educational programs than men, but that the expected life span for women is significantly higher than it is for men, so naturally, there are more women than men participating. However, this present trend is likely to change as the gap in the life span between women and men continues to decrease (Dychtwald & Flower, 1989). Furthermore, as the life span increases and older adults are living more active and healthy lives, there will likely be an overall increase in educational participation of the older adult population.

Level of Education

The participants in this study reported higher-than-average levels of education, i.e., 30% had a university education, 24% had completed high school, and over a third indicated they had either attended college or received occupational training. Only 11% of the participants indicated they had less than a high school education. This finding is not surprising since it is widely acknowledged in the literature that older adults participating in educational programs are likely to have higher-than-average levels of education (Peterson, 1983). These findings are similar to a study of older adults in college programs in that the participants were almost equally distributed between college graduates and high school graduates (Barnes, 1987).

The literature also frequently reports that age is inversely related to participation in educational programs (Peterson, 1981), that is the older the individual the less formal education. However, in this study the older adult

group aged 75 to 82 had comparable education levels to those in the two younger age groups, and in fact, a greater per cent had attended university. Since formal education is a significant predictor of participation in educational programs, it can be expected that the future older adult population, such as the baby boomers, will have higher levels of participation than the present group of older adults.

Level of Income

Over half of the participants in this study (55%) indicated their annual income was below $25,000, while the remainder earned above this level. The American Association of Retired Persons (1986) reported that older adults with an annual income of $20,000 or greater are more likely to participate in educational programs. However, due to the higher income level used in this study, it is not possible to determine the average annual income of the participants and how it compares to the income reported by the American Association of Retired Persons. A concern stated by Barnes (1987) is that although some educational programs are attracting some lower income participants, there are fewer older adult participants from the lowest income levels. The present study was unable to distinguish between older adults whose level of income was sufficient to allow them to participate and those whose income was insufficient to allow participation in educational programs.

Types of Courses

The most popular type of courses previously taken by 90% of the participants in this study were general interest courses. The researcher considered liberal arts courses to be in the general arts category. The other

categories of courses included leisure/recreation, career/professional training, and pre-retirement courses. Because the study sample involved only those that were at the time attending liberal arts courses, it was not possible to verify that older adults prefer to attend liberal arts courses, as reported by Brady and Fowler (1988), Courtenay (1990), Covey (1982), and Graney and Hays (1976).

Number of Course Hours

Fewer than half of the participants in the study (45%) indicated they spent approximately 30 to 60 hours per year attending courses, while about a third (31%) attended more than 60 hours per year. In the literature review conducted to support this study the researcher found no reference to a number of course hours or number of courses taken by older adults. Considering the future implications of this finding, while recognizing that participation in educational programs is inversely related to levels of education, it is possible that future groups of older adults who will have higher levels of education than the present group, may also spend more hours per year participating in courses. An increase in the number of course hours may also influence attendance in a greater variety of courses.

Age-Integrated and Age-Segregated Courses

When asked to indicate their preference for age-integrated or age-segregated courses, over a third of the older adult participants in this study said that it did not matter while about a third cited a preference for age-integrated courses. Only about a quarter of the participants reported a preference for age-segregated courses. Although these findings do not suggest a strong preference for either type of course, studies conducted by Clough

(1992) and Hooper (1981) found that older adults had a slight preference for age-integrated courses.

Given that in this study there were no strong preferences for age-integrated or age-segregated courses it may be reasonable to support the position in the literature which advocates age-segregated courses for subjects of particularly relevance for older adults (Marcus & Havighurst, 1980). This position is supported further by some of the open-ended responses in this study in which participants stated that a preference for age-integrated or age-segregated classes depended on the course topic. However, as stated by Courtenay (1980) the most important point should be that each educational sponsor, program, and learning experience for older adults be reviewed for the purpose, subject content, and clientele prior to determining if courses should be age-segregated or age-integrated.

Due to the increasing popularity of adult education across the span of adult years anticipated in the future and because of the wide age span in many classes, future groups of older adults may have a more definite preference for such age-integrated courses. On the other hand, for the same reason stated above, older adults may develop a greater preference for age-segregated courses.

Preferred Number of Participants per Class

This study found that the majority of participants had a preference for classes with between 12 and 25 people. Although there were no other strong preferences for class size, almost a quarter of the participants indicated that it did not matter how many were in a class. Research by Daniel et al. (1977) recommended that class size be limited to 28 participants. Older adults may

prefer smaller classes because they may be hesitant about returning to the classroom for the first time and lack self-confidence. A class between 12 and 25 people may be less intimidating. Older adults may also prefer a small class size because it is more conducive for social interaction, which is a major motivating factor for participation of many older adults (Peterson, 1983). This is supported by the findings of this study which indicated that many participants preferred a class format which included discussions that facilitated participation and interaction. In addition, results indicated that a preference for a mostly discussion instructional method was associated with a preference for a class size of 12 to 25 participants.

Location Preferences

The majority of participants indicated a preference for courses offered by community-based organizations versus educational institutions. This finding is consistent with Ventura's study (1982) which found that community-based organizations were the most frequently used educational provider by older adults followed closely by educational institutions. One of the reasons for this preference, according to a study by Barnes (1987), is that many older adults are not comfortable attending courses on college campuses because many grew up in the depression era and did not have an opportunity to attend institutions of higher learning. Although the participants in this study were from the same generation as those in Barnes' study, this study did not address the reasons for preferring courses located at community-based organizations and, therefore, Barnes' finding cannot be validated.

The heterogeneity of the older population is another reason for a community-based course preference because a broader cross section of older

adults can be served by a diverse range of programs offered by community organizations (Kabwasa, 1988). Considering the large number of community-based organizations offering courses to older adults, it may not be surprising that the participants in this study indicated such a preference. According to Courtenay (1990), community-based organizations are "among the most prominent locations for educational activities . . . primarily because of their ability to respond in alternative ways to the diverse learning needs of older students" (p. 37).

Educational institutions have been criticized for falling short of providing programs for the communities they are intended to serve (Borthwick, 1983). It has only been in recent years that educational institutions have begun to provide programs for the older adult population, and even this provision has been sporadic and limited. Despite the rapid increase in the older adult population, educational institutions have been slow to respond to this clientele, even though this group has expressed an interest in educational programs. Demographic projections which show an increase in growth of the older population and a decrease in the birth rate and indicates that in the future a smaller population of younger people will be attending educational institutions (Courtenay, 1989; Dychtwald & Flower, 1989; Peterson, 1983). It then appears reasonable that the older segment of the population represents a large potential student group for educational institutions. By developing and encouraging programs for older adults, educational institutions can ensure that they remain a valued resource in the community as well as relieve some of the financial restraint facing them. Glendenning (1985) suggests that educational institutions take the approach of establishing themselves as resources available to community groups.

If educational institutions and community-based organization program providers continue to expand, it will be interesting to see if future groups of older adults will have the same preferences as the present group of older adults. It would appear reasonable, given that future groups of older adults will be better educated and more familiar with educational institutions, that course location preferences may shift toward courses offered by these educational institutions.

In this study, among the course locations offered by community-based organizations, seniors' centers were preferred by two-thirds of the participants. This finding also indicated that this preference increased with a participant's age. This suggests that as a person ages, he or she engages in different organizations. For example, as one's family matures, its affiliations with local schools and community centers diminish and new associations are made, such as with seniors' centers.

In summary, the most important point is not necessarily which location is preferred, but that given the heterogeneity of the older population, the diversity of educational providers must be maintained and expanded in order to attract older adults who are not presently participating in programs, and particularly those who are in isolated socioeconomic groups. "Until education is better accepted as a suitable activity for older adults, it will be difficult to attract them to participate. One way to do so is to hold classes in more desirable meeting places, such as churches, park fieldhouses, neighborhood social centers, senior clubs, and even private homes." (Marcus & Havighurst, 1980, p. 42). McDaniel (1984) reinforced this position and advocates the need for greater consciousness raising and coordination efforts by both educational institutions and community-based organizations.

Location Factors

In considering the relative importance of various location factors, the literature notes that transportation is a potential barrier to participation. The findings from this study support this position by identifying two transportation factors of particular importance to participants, i.e., the ease of travelling to a course and the availability of parking. The ease of travelling to a course was cited as most important for 70% of the participants. This is consistent with the findings of Peterson (1980) and Yeo (1982) who reported that older adults prefer setting that are accessible and convenient. Almost three-quarters of the female participants (73%) compared to over half of the males (55%) indicated the ease of travelling to a location was very important. The greater importance of the travelling factor for women is substantiated by Barnes (1987). The second most important location factor for 59% of the participants was the availability of parking. Although, a greater number of the female participants (61%) than the male participants (52%) indicated parking was more important, the difference was not as large.

Given that the older adult population is living longer, healthier, and active lives, it is possible that future groups of older adults may not have the same level of concern about transportation. In addition, the sophistication of urban transportation systems and special transportation accommodations developing for an older adult population may also contribute to a reduction of this concern.

The cost of a course was considered very important to only 28% of the participants compared to somewhat important (61%). In a comparison between the female and male participants, a third of the female participants found cost to be very important while very few (7%) of the male participants

cited cost as very important. This finding is not surprising considering the literature reports women--young and old--to be less financially well off than men. The slow but gradually narrowing gap of income levels between the men and women suggests that future groups of older adult men and women may view the importance of course costs similarly.

A course located close to home was considered very important to 28% of the participants and over half of the participants (54%) considered it somewhat important. This finding is consistent with studies by Peterson (1981) and Price and Lyon (1982) who found that older adults preferred to attend those organizations that were close and familiar.

A course sponsor was considered very important by 20% of the participants and somewhat important by 37%, while 43% indicated the sponsor was not important. This finding suggests that older adults do take into consideration the course sponsor when deciding to attend a course. The findings in this study indicating a preference for community-based organization sponsors over educational institution sponsors lends further support to this finding. A factor which may influence the preference for a community-based sponsor may be the number of different community organizations which offer programs for older adults as compared to the few offered by educational institutions. Furthermore, as stated by Courtenay (1990), community organizations are viewed as providing for all members of the community, therefore, a greater sense of ownership is developed and hence participation in programs.

Importance of Location

When participants were asked about the relative importance of a location nearly all indicated it was very important to somewhat important. Less than a tenth indicated location was not important. A difference in the importance of location between the genders showed that over half of the women felt location was very important compared to about the same number of men who felt location was only a somewhat important consideration in choosing a course. One of the reasons women may have indicated location was very important relates to transportation and the ease of travelling to a course. Barnes (1987) notes that transportation can be a participation barrier particularly for women. However, the women in future older adult groups may not find transportation and course location as important as the current group of older women because they may have access to increased means of mobility, e.g., more women will be able to provide their own transportation or have access to improved public transportation systems.

Scheduling Preferences

Time of Day

Participants indicated that the preferred time of day to attend a course was morning starting after 9:30 a.m. The second preferred time was afternoon finishing before 4:00 p.m. This finding is consistent with a study by Daniel et al. (1977) who found that classes should commence after the morning rush hour in the morning and finish before the evening rush hour. This finding also supports the results of Courtenay (1990) and Yeo (1982) which advocate that courses be scheduled during day from late morning to mid-afternoon in order to prevent older adults from travelling after dark. It is interesting to

note that almost half of the participants in this study indicated that they would sometimes attend an evening course, although almost half indicated they would never. Full day courses were sometimes preferred by over half of the participants.

Rather than attempting to determine one particular time of day or the most preferred time of day to schedule courses, program providers should remain flexible and provide options to suite the lifestyles and preferences of their older adult clientele. The ability to do this would of course depend upon the size and resources of the specific organization, and the nature of the organization's clientele.

Day of Week

The majority of the participants indicated a preference for attending courses on a week day. This is consistent with the findings of Courtenay (1990) which indicated that participants preferred week day courses.

Time of Year

The fall was ranked the most preferred time of year to attend a course by 55% of the participants. Spring was the second preferred time of year followed by winter. Summer was a very unpopular time of year to attend a course. There are a few possible reasons why the participants in this study indicated a preference for fall and spring courses. One of the reasons is that many older adults living in the northern hemisphere travel to warm southern locations for extended periods of time during the Canadian winter and return in the early spring. Another possible reason is that many older

adults may prefer to limit their travel during the winter months when the weather is poor. These particular trends are likely to continue in the future.

Course Duration

Two-thirds of the participants indicated a preference to attend a course once a week for four to six weeks or once a week for more than six weeks. Half of the participants indicated they sometimes preferred to attend a one-day course. Three-quarters of the participants would never attend a course five days a week or live-in courses. The preference to attend a course once a week is consistent with the findings of Daniel et al. (1977), Sekiguchi (1984) and Yeo (1982). Yeo indicated that attending courses once a week reduces the transportation problems encountered by many older adults. Many older adults lead active lives today and so this preference is not surprising, nor would it be unrealistic to expect future groups of older adults to change their preference for this course duration.

Age of Instructor

The majority of participants in this study indicated that the age of the instructor did not matter. As reported for age-integrated or age-segregated courses, the age of the instructor may depend upon the nature of the course content. This was noted by one participant in response to the open-ended option about the age of instructors. Other participants were not concerned with an instructor's age but rather with their ability, expertise, and communication skills.

Although the literature does not report any older adult preferences for younger or older instructors, a number of references have been made to the

importance of training instructors to teach older adults (Marcus & Havighurst, 1980; Schuetz, 1981; Yeo, 1982). In the future, it will not be sufficient to provide special training only for those interested in teaching older adults. The increasing demand for adult education across the life span, along with an increasing number of age-integrated classes, will require all adult educators to be trained in some aspects of educational gerontology. This type of training would assist instructors, program developers, and program sponsors to attract the older adult population. According to Marcus and Havighurst, adult educators with this background will "ensure greater sensitivity to the physical and social attributes of aging" (p. 41). Courtenay (1990) emphasizes the importance of providing training for staff in community-based organizations in order for them to "understand the value of education to older persons--and to understand the staff members' own aging" (p. 43). Furthermore, community-based organizations that provided this training would strengthen the support for lifelong learning within the community.

Instructional Methods

When questioned about their preferred instructional methods, over three-quarters of the participants indicated they preferred a lecture with some discussion among the class. The second most preferred method was a lecture format and was preferred by over half of the participants. A mostly discussion method and a mixture of activities were preferred by just over a third of the participants. The preference for a lecture and some discussion is supported by Borthwick (1983), Roberto and McGraw (1990), and Schuetz (1982) whose studies indicated that older adults prefer a format which allows

them to participate in discussion by providing information and sharing life experiences as well as receiving information.

Contrary to Davenport's (1986) study which found that women preferred discussions while men preferred lectures, this study found that over half of the men preferred mostly discussion compared to less than a third of the women. In addition, the men and women in this study indicated an equal preference for lectures, and a similar preference for a method that included lectures and some discussions.

In addition to older adult preferences for a lecture and discussion method, Courtenay (1990) indicated that there are older adults who have a preference for a lecture method because the learning process is lead by the instructor which allows them to take a more passive role. This is supported by the findings of this study which found a lecture to be the second most preferred instructional method. In contrast, Roberto and McGraw (1990) found that the lecture format was the least preferred. A research study by Sekiguchi (1984) found that one's attitude toward instructional methods may be influenced by one's previous formal education. For example, those who prefer the formal structure of a lecture may prefer this method because of the association with prior education.

In determining the application of one method or another, Courtenay (1990) suggests that subject content, participants' education level, and the learning objectives be taken into consideration. Taking into account the diversity of the older adult population this approach would seem appropriate. However, determining the participants actual preferences should be the

primary consideration, and these preferences should have priority over other factors assumed to be important by program developers and instructors.

An expansion of the preferred instructional methods question asked participants to indicate what they liked or did not like about each of the four instructional methods. Reasons for liking a lecture related primarily to the instructor. This finding is consistent with those of Paplia-Finlay et al. (1985) who found that older adults perceived instructors as having the expertise and knowledge they do not, therefore, a lecture would facilitate the learning process. The second reason cited for liking a lecture was related to the structure of the lecture format, i.e., organized, easier to follow and more informative. Again, this preference may be a result of the influence of prior education as suggested by Sekiguchi (1984). The third reason cited for liking a lecture, which may also be related to the influence of prior education, was learning-related, i.e., it provided solid information, new facts, figures, and perspectives, and it provided learners with the most information.

The participants in this study also indicated instructor-related and structure-related reasons for not liking a lecture. For example, lectures were disliked if an instructor was not knowledgeable of the subject, a poor speaker, boring, and opinionated. Structure-related comments indicated lectures were less stimulating, provided no opportunity for feedback, and narrowed the scope of the subject material. A few responses also indicated the tendency to fall asleep during a lecture as another reason for not liking a lecture method.

The most preferred instructional method was a lecture with some discussion. The predominant reason for liking this method was related to class participation. Comments from participants indicated that other learners

have interesting things to add, everyone is involved, and there is more enjoyment with class participation. This finding is similar to those of Borthwick (1983) and Schuetz (1982) who found that older adults enjoyed sharing information and experiences with their peers.

The primary reason participants cited for not liking a lecture with some discussion was that some may dominate the discussion. The research by Paplia-Finlay et al. (1985) suggested that some older adults prefer the lecture method which allows passive involvement rather than listening to classmates providing opinions on a topic. Other reasons for not liking this method were the tendency to go off-topic and because it wasted time.

The reasons for liking mostly discussion were identical to those for a lecture and some discussion, i.e., class participation and learning from others; however, the mostly discussion method was much less preferred. Again, the reasons for not liking this method were identical to those for a lecture and some discussion, i.e., student domination, waste of time, and tendency to go off-topic. Although the findings from this study indicated that mostly discussion was one of the least preferred instructional methods, Yeo (1982) advocates that older adults should be allowed maximum participation.

The primary reason for liking a mixture of activities as an instructional method was the variety that it provided the participants. A second reason was that more was learned by using a mixture of activities. Participants disliked this method because they felt it was a poor way to learn, it wasted time, and lacked instruction. Others found it difficult to concentrate if a mixture of activities were used, while others indicated physical limitations which hindered them. Some participants also expressed a dislike for small

group work. Once again, exposure to a variety of instructional activities through previous formal education may predispose some older adults to dislike this type of instructional method.

Many authors believe that the basic principles of teaching older adults are the same as those used for teaching younger adults. It would be interesting to note how prior formal education influences older adults' preferences in instructional methods in the future. For example, the interactive formats used currently in classrooms, such as the seminar and small group work, may influence adults' preference for more discussion and less lecture in the future. Nevertheless, the older population will continue to be heterogeneous and there will always be a number of individuals who prefer to assume a passive role in the classroom. Regardless of the instructional methods applied, if the subject material is practical, relevant, of interest to the learners, well-organized, and presented in a stimulating manner, a learning experience would tend to be more successful and enjoyable.

Input into Instructional Methods

When participants were asked if they would like to have input into the instructional methods used the majority of participants indicated that they would sometimes like to have input. Although the literature does not address older adult preference for input into the instructional methods used, the responses from this study support Knowles (1980) and Peterson (1983) who advocate the involvement of older adults in the planning and implementation of the instructional process. This would be appropriate considering that older adults have definite preferences for

various instructional methods, therefore, they should be able to participant in the instructional planning process.

When considering the preferences of future groups of older adults for input into the instructional methods used, it will be interesting to note what changes there may be. It is possible that future older adults who will have had greater exposure to educational opportunities and instructional methods may be more inclined to provide input into the instructional methods used in the classroom.

Recommendations

Two sets of recommendations resulting from this study are provided. The first set is based on the findings of this study and concentrate on recommendations for practice in the field of educational gerontology. The second set of recommendations relate to areas for further research to expand or confirm the findings of this study.

Recommendations for Practice

1. It would appear from the study sample that educational institutions and community-based organizations may wish to consider the extent to which they provide educational programs to older adults who are socioeconomically disadvantaged.

2. Educational institutions and community-based organizations providing educational programs should maximize the number of course locations to ensure extensive access and availability for the older adults in the

community. For example, local school facilities would provide accessible locations.

3. When selecting course locations and marketing courses, educational providers should consider location factors such as the transportation means available to the location and accessibility of parking.

4. The size of classes for older adults should be limited to 12 to 25 participants.

5. Educational providers should schedule courses for the older adult population primarily in the fall and spring, with limited course offerings in the winter and summer.

6. Educational providers should schedule courses on a week day, Monday to Friday, either in the morning starting after 9:30 a.m., or in the afternoon finishing before 4:00 p.m. A limited number of evening courses may also scheduled.

7. The duration of a courses should be once a week for four to six week or more than six weeks. In addition, one day courses could be scheduled periodically.

8. Instructors should confirm with the older adult learners if the use of a lecture and some class discussion is an agreeable instructional method, or if they have a preference for another type of instructional method.

9. Educational program providers should monitor changes in their clientele's learning environment preferences over time and as new clientele develops.

Recommendations for Further Research

1. A similar study should be conducted using older adults in other types of courses such as leisure or recreation and career or professional courses.

2. A similar study should be conducted in other large urban centers in Canada to validate the findings.

3. A similar study should identify the reasons older adults prefer courses offered by educational institutions or community-based organizations to change or enhance the educational programs they provide in order to attract more older learners.

4. A similar study should include sample groups from various community-based organizations such as community centers and churches that provide educational programming in order to determine their learning environment preferences.

5. Further research should include additional learning environment characteristics such as preferred time length of a class, preference for morning or afternoon classes, and participant input into content for a better understanding of older adult learning environment preferences.

Concluding Comment

The field of adult education is as diverse and comprehensive as its philosophy as reflected by the range of programs, educational methods, content, and clientele (Peterson, 1974). The growth and development of

educational gerontology illustrates the diversity of adult education opportunities for an aging society, as well as for adult educators.

A primary challenge for adult educators and educational program providers is to acknowledge older adults as a viable client group within the lifelong learning concept. In expanding the provision of educational opportunities for older adults, it is essential for adult educators to consider the learning environment preferences of diverse older adult client groups and provide the necessary modifications to increase the chances of success and satisfaction.

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APPENDIX A

10747 - 50 Street,
Edmonton, Alberta,
T6A 2E3

April 15, 1992

Manager,
Senior Studies Institute,
7319 - 29 Avenue,
Edmonton, Alberta,
T6K 2P1

Dear Ms. Hastie:

I am a graduate student in the Adult, Career and Technology Department at the University of Alberta, and am at the stage of finalizing my thesis proposal. The focus of my studies while in the program has been in educational gerontology and the topic of my thesis is the preferred learning environment characteristics of older adults adults.

In a discussion with Dr. Puffer about his involvement with the Senior Studies Institute and my research, he made reference to yourself as a contact for my research. The methodology for my study involves administering a survey questionnaire to older adults participating in educational programs in the Edmonton area. My purpose in writing to you is to request permission to access a group of about 75 older adults presently participating at the Senior Studies Institute in order to administer the questionnaire.

I have attached a draft copy of the survey questionnaire. Upon conclusion would be pleased to share the findings of my research with the Senior Studies Institute .

I look forward to hearing from you and can be contacted at 466-0817.

Yours sincerely,

Kathy Dowding

10747 - 50 Street,
Edmonton, Alberta,
T6A 2E3

April 21, 1992

Margaret Fisher,
Liberal Studies,
Faculty of Extension,
University of Alberta,
Edmonton, Alberta,
T6G 2T4

Dear Margaret:

I am writing to follow up on our very brief introduction by Dianne Dutton in February. I am a graduate student in the Adult, Career and Technology Department at the University of Alberta, and am at the stage of finalizing my thesis proposal. At the time of our meeting, I mentioned that I was interested in collecting data from the Faculty of Extension's senior studies program in the spring session. The focus of my studies while in the program has been in educational gerontology, and the topic of my thesis is study of the preferred learning environment characteristics of older adults.

The methodology for my study involves administering a survey questionnaire to older adults participating in educational programs in the Edmonton area. My purpose in writing to you is to request permission to access a group of about 75 older adults, who will be participants in the Liberal Studies spring session, in order to administer the questionnaire.

I have attached a draft copy of the survey questionnaire. Upon conclusion would be pleased to share the findings of my research with the Faculty of Extension.

I look forward to hearing from you and discussing this request further. I can be contacted at 466-0817.

Yours sincerely,

Kathy Dowding

APPENDIX B

THE PREFERRED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT CHARACTERISTICS OF OLDER ADULTS 1992

The purpose of this study is to identify the preferred learning environment characteristics of older adults. If for any reason you are not comfortable, or do not want to complete this questionnaire, please check here___and return.

Instructions: Please answer each question by circling the number that best describes your reaction to the question. This questionnaire should take about 15 minutes to complete. Thank you.

1. What is your age? _____.

2. What is your gender? *(Circle one).*

   1) male

   2) female

3. Recalling all of the courses you took in the past year, where were they located? *(Circle all that apply).*

1) university or community college [e.g. University of Alberta, Grant MacEwan Community College]

2) community-based organization [e.g. Senior Studies Institute (Minerva), community centre, seniors' centre, seniors' organization, Edmonton Public Continuing Education, church, YM/YWCA, etc.]

3) other (please specify) _____.

4. In the past year what was the approximate number of hours you spent attending one or more courses? *(Circle one).*

   1) under 30 hours a year

   2) 30 - 60 hours a year

   3) more than 60 hours a year

5. What type of courses have you taken in the past year? *(Circle all that apply).*

   1) career or professional training

   2) pre-retirement planning

   3) leisure/recreation

   4) general interest

   5) other (please specify)

_____.

6. When deciding to attend a course, how important is the location to you? *(Circle one).*

   1) not very important

   2) somewhat important

   3) very important

7. If a course of interest to you was offered at the following locations, please indicate whether your preference for that location would be Never; Rarely; Sometimes; Fairly Often; Most Often.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Most Often
1) University of Alberta	1	2	3	4	5
2) Community college	1	2	3	4	5
3) Senior Studies Institute (Grant MacEwan College)	1	2	3	4	5
4) local community centre	1	2	3	4	5
5) local school	1	2	3	4	5
6) seniors' centre	1	2	3	4	5
7) seniors' organization	1	2	3	4	5
8) other	1	2	3	4	5

(please specify) _____

8. When choosing a course, please indicate whether the following considerations are Not Important; Somewhat Important; Very Important.

	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important
1) close to your home	1	2	3
2) easy to travel to	1	2	3
3) parking available	1	2	3
4) course sponsor	1	2	3
5) cost	1	2	3
6) other	1	2	3

(please specify) _____

9. When you attend a course what age do you prefer the other participants to be? *(Circle one).*

1) older than you

2) about your age

3) mixed ages - younger and older than you

4) younger than you

5) doesn't matter

6) depends on (please specify) _____.

10. When you attend a course what age do you prefer the instructor to be? *(Circle one).*

1) older than you

2) about your age

3) younger than you

4) doesn't matter

5) depends on (please specify) _____ _____.

11. When attending a course, please indicate whether your preference for the following times are Never; Sometimes; Most Often.

	Never	Sometimes	Most Often
1) morning only - starting time before 9:30 a.m.	1	2	3
2) morning only - starting time after 9:30 a.m.	1	2	3
3) afternoon only - finishing time before 4:00 p.m.	1	2	3
4) afternoon only - finishing time about 4:30 p.m.	1	2	3
5) all day - 9:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.	1	2	3
6) evening	1	2	3

12. What part of the week do you prefer when attending a course? *(Circle one).*

    1) week days (Monday to Friday)

    2) week end day (Saturday and/or Sunday)

    3) doesn't matter

13. What time of the year do you prefer to attend a course? ***(Rank in order of preference)***
    (1= first choice; 2= second choice; 3= third choice; 4= fourth choice).

    1) winter (December to March) ____.

    2) spring (April and May) ____.

    3) summer (June to August) ____.

    4) fall (September to November) ____.

14. For **each** of the various course lengths listed below, please indicate whether your preference is Never; Rarely; Sometimes; Fairly Often; Most Often.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Most Often
1) one-day course	1	2	3	4	5
2) once a week for 3 weeks or less	1	2	3	4	5
3) once a week for about 4-6 weeks	1	2	3	4	5
4) once a week for more than 6 weeks	1	2	3	4	5
5) twice a week for 3 weeks or less	1	2	3	4	5
6) twice a week for about 4-8 weeks	1	2	3	4	5
7) five times a week for 1 week	1	2	3	4	5
8) five times a week for 3 weeks	1	2	3	4	5
9) five times a week for 3 weeks	1	2	3	4	5
10) live-in course for 2-5 days	1	2	3	4	5

15. How many people do you prefer to have in a course with you? *(Circle one).*

1) fewer than 12 people

2) between 12 and 25 people

3) between 26 and 40 people

4) more than 40

5) doesn't matter

16. From the following list of instructional methods please indicate whether your preference for each is Never; Rarely; Sometimes; Usually; Always.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
1) lecture by instructor	1	2	3	4	5
2) lecture and some class discussion	1	2	3	4	5
3) mostly discussion with instructor and class	1	2	3	4	5
4) mixture of activities, such as discussion, small group work, films, field trips	1	2	3	4	5

17. Please indicate what you <u>do like</u> or <u>don't like</u> about the following instructional methods.

1) I <u>like</u> a lecture by the instructor because_____.

_____.

2) I <u>don't like</u> a lecture by the instructor because_____.

_____.

3) I <u>like</u> lecture and <u>some</u> discussion amongst the class because_____.

_____.

4) I <u>don't like</u> lecture and <u>some</u> discussion amongst the class because _____

_____.

5) I like mostly discussion with the instructor and other students because _____

_____.

6) I don't like mostly discussion with the instructor and other students because _____

_____.

7) I like a mixture of activities because_____.

_____.

8) I don't like a mixture of activities because_____

_____.

18. As a participant in a course would you like to have some input into the instructional methods used by the instructor? ***(Circle one).***

1) never

2) rarely

3) sometimes

4) most of the time

5) all of the time

6) depends on (please specify) _____.

19. As a participant in a course would you like to have some input into the content to be covered? ***(Circle one).***

1) never

2) rarely

3) sometimes

4) most of the time

5) all of the time

6) depends on (please specify) _____.

20. What is the highest level of education you have completed? ***(Circle one).***

1) less than high school

2) completed high school

3) college

4) university

5) occupational/vocational training

6) other (specify) _____.

21. What was your approximate gross income for 1991? (This information is being collected for statistical purposes only).

1) under $25,000 per year

2) over $25,000 per year

Please feel free to make any comments about learning environments

_____.

_____.

_____.

_____.

_____.

Thank you for your time and participation

APPENDIX C

10747 - 50 Street,
Edmonton, Alberta
T6A 2E3

October 5 , 1992

Hello!

I am a graduate student at the University of Alberta and am conducting a research survey for my thesis on educational programs for older adults. Part of the research study group involves a sample of those who attended the University of Alberta's Spring Session for Seniors. The University has approved of the study and has agreed that I may contact participants to request their voluntary participation.

The purpose of this study is to identify the preferred learning environment characteristics of older adults. The attached survey, should you choose to complete it, should take about 15 minutes of your time. It would be very much appreciated if it could be returned to me in the stamped, addressed envelope enclosed by October 23, 1992.

Your participation in this study is totally voluntary, and you may be assured that your responses will remain completely confidential. If you have questions about the study, please write or call. My telephone number is 466-0817.

Thank you for your cooperation!

Your sincerely,

Kathy Dowding

enclosure